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the

hot

ROBERT L. FOREMAN

half

CRITERION BOOKS

NEW YORK

hour

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*Designed by Sidney Feinberg*

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The lines from "On the Street Where You Live" on page 189  
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To Madison Avenue—

the street where I live



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A tisket, a tasket  
A green and yellow basket  
I took an option on My Love  
And on the way I dropped it.

—FROM THE UNPUBLISHED WORKS OF ROGER NORDEN

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**the hot half hour**

•





## *one*

The dry arroyo that is Madison Avenue begins technically at 23rd Street and calls it quits at the Harlem River and 138th. But most of its inhabitants, during the daylight hours at least, have never been to the ends. And it's even surer that the ones this story deals with have seldom, if ever, been anywhere on Madison except in the forties and fifties.

Not that this makes much difference. I just want to point out that our Madison Avenue and the street that bears the name aren't really the same thing—or even the same place, because the Madison Avenue I'm talking about has already oozed over onto Fifth in the fancy new office buildings of the last few years and over onto Park and Lexington where they've got a couple of these big new put-em-up-all-at-once architectural abortions. Come to think of it, even Third has become snotty enough to try and move in since they took down the El.

Anyhow, Madison Avenue, the way it is used here, is not a street. It's a frame of reference and a frame of mind. It's a lot of different people who come from all sorts of different places and make widely different salaries and drink very dif-

ferent brands of liquor. But often in their lives—many times a day in fact—they all act exactly alike.

That's because they're beset by the same worries and fears and maybes, all of which are set in motion by the same thing—the Ad Game. Or call it the Advertising Agency Business as we like to have it referred to. This Madison Avenue—the one I'm involved with—is the agency business, giving roost to the big ones and the little ones. The big ones trying to stay big. The little ones trying desperately to get big. It's made up of the Old Line outfits where most of the people working have never seen the people whose names are on the door, mainly because they've been dead twenty-five years. Or rich and living in Tucson. Or having fun with politics. Or weaving baskets. It's made up of the upstarts where the name on the nice, embossed, bond letterhead is the same as on the front office, usually a man about fifty-five who looks ten years older and has already had his first heart attack.

It's not just the agencies either. It's the networks too. Both radio and television. It's the station people and the station reps. It's the magazine reps and the vast periphery of printing salesmen and engravers and photographers and photostat makers and God knows who else.

It always worries the people who work on our street when they read books and go to movies about Ad-Men-on-Madison-Avenue that the guys in the plot are such handsome heels. And are so rich. And are so damn successful with women.

They go to work the next day and look around them and there's homely old Joe who coaches a Little League team and sends twenty bucks a week off to his mother-in-law. Across the aisle is Pete who's been twenty years in the job and has a kid who was badly crippled with polio and is about seven thousand behind in doctor's bills and is still worrying whether he can get enough of a mortgage to swing the new

house he needs because a fourth kid is in the oven. And over there is Ted who wouldn't know what to do if some French movie star threw her arms around him but blush and stammer, "Look, lady, my wife's expecting me home on the 5:21."

About 99.8 per cent of them are like this, trying to make a living and to live it up in a modest way while they put a few bucks aside for a rainy day or when the account is lost and he gets a pink slip or when he is ready to toss in the sponge and retire to some little bungalow beside some stream where the big-mouth bass jump right into your boat.

Who's going to write a book or film a movie about people like that?

It's like my boss says about our business. There's fewer ad men than lawyers or doctors in the country's jails.

On the other hand, things can and do happen on this street—strange things, so different from the norm they make you wonder if you're in the same business.

This is a story about the unusual. About something that hit Madison Avenue like a megaton of goldbricks. Suddenly—as a result of it—one ad agency that had been going along doing business in a quiet decent sort of way for about sixty years found itself declaring open season on the Fast Finagle and the Double Deal and the Planted Rumor. They felt as out of place as a 4-H Clubber up at the bar at Twenty-One.

All my training and background had been in this normal-type ad business. Then one day I found a switchblade knife in my fist, and I discovered I could use it. Did use it, in fact—and often. Got real good at it and won plenty of minor rumbles along the way. But somehow I lost the Main Event.

You'll know what I'm referring to if you happened to catch the squib in the ad column of the *New York Times* about the House of Karess fashions account pulling out of our ad agency. I don't know why I take the trouble to specify the *Times*. Every paper that carries an ad column had the story,

because it was about the juiciest bit of news along Madison for the past year. And the reason for this is pure and simple—the two partners that run the House of Karess, Merton Karamaz and Myron Essenger, considered *magna cum laude* in the World of Fashion for their superior ability to sever a competitor's jugular vein as well as for making an ad agency squirm under their educated needle. Any time Mert and/or Myron just as much as go to the bathroom, believe me, somebody is bound to get it in the face since this is their way of doing things and they're not ever going to change. And why should they? They're Number One and Number Two man in the most successful femme-fashions business in the whole world, and each one has a cool five million in his Italian-silk, hand-tailored pocket.

Getting back to that item in the ad column. It hit Madison Avenue and especially our agency—Roux & Day, Inc.—right in between our bloodshot eyes, which means to the tune of the ten million bucks, which is the biggest part of the Karess yearly budget. Incidentally, what came off the fan also plastered itself on me, because I was the guy who brought the account in in the first place almost two years ago and was the fair-haired boy until the Partners got acting like Central Casting would expect and cut the rug out from under me.

Oh yes—and quite a coincidence. In the same edition of the good solid *New York Times* was a squib a few pages the other side of the ad column about a doll named Cranston—Mary Cranston—getting hitched to a young TV director. Mary Cranston goes under the stage name of Lana Lynn, which I'm sure you'll recognize unless you're the only adult in the country who never saw "Put 'N Take," the big-money give-away quiz, on your TV set.

I bring her up because she's part of the story, just as she was part of my life—how much so I didn't realize then—along with "Put 'N Take" and the House of Karess and

Merton and Myron. But as I was saying, it all come to a fast fade a little over a year from the time I had lunch in the Colonial Room of the old Carver Hotel to meet Merton Karamaz and Myron Essenger for the first time to convince them that I was the Second Coming, since TV was their problem, and that they'd better put some of their advertising millions in the hands of Roux & Day, Inc.

## *two*

"If you will keep your yap buttoned and your ears open for just five minutes, I will give you the entire script from Main Title to Credits." Al was doing the talking via the telephone. Al Boland, top man at Stars, Inc., producers of "The best in TV," which includes such epics as "Triangle Theater" and "Your Lucky Day." The person at the receiving end of the dialogue was me.

"I have got this date for lunch all arranged between you and the business world's leading heavies, Mert Karamaz and Myron Essenger."

"How'd you do that?" I said.

"Precisely this way. For weeks now I been talking you up. The hottest man in the agency racket. Only guy on Madison Avenue who knows his ass from third base. I gave them the ad man routine. How you came up through writing ads."

It was good business for Al to build me up. I realized that. He knew I'd pay him back in kind if and when I had the chance. Also the guy liked me. And I liked him. It was sort of a mutual admiration society—not too common in a bus-

iness where one's admiration often stopped after a glance in the mirror.

"Why do they listen to you?" I asked.

"Lissen to the man. Because I am their consultant. For the tune of One Gee per week I am unburdening myself of my production wisdom to these characters. I advise 'em on shows. On commercials. On lady announcers. I even do a little pimping on the side."

"And what has prevented you from getting them a decent show? That 'Melodrama Playhouse' they are stuck with on UBC could be described as larceny. Only it isn't exciting enough."

"This is no time for recriminations. Especially coming from you who I am about to do a favor for. Also I am about to lose my stipend, I can tell. So all along I've been giving you the build. Copy. Announcers. Models. Show judgment. Time spots. I got 'em so hot for you they can't breathe right."

"What do they expect of me?"

"They want you as ad manager. They're going to start delegating some authority instead of playing pitcher, catcher, coach, and bleachers, all themselves. You can write your own ticket—one hundred thousand dollars. Maybe more. Stock options. Sexy office on Park Avenue. Geisha girl with a B-cup for a secretary. You name it. They're ready to give it to you."

"Sorry, Al, and thanks, but I'm not interested. I'm not the ad-manager type, you know that. Also I like my present employment. After eighteen years you get used to it. I know which john not to use and who's sleepable in the steno pool and where to steal brand-new Eagle pencils. A fellow can't throw all that away. Especially just for money," I added.

"Jay-zuz, you are a square," said Al into the phone very loud. "I never saw it fail. An agency man who wears a vest always thinks like that. Well, son, I tried."

"And I appreciate it."

"I'll tell 'em you said to go screw, although that'll make these characters want you all the more. They may even kidnap you now."

"Maybe I should keep the lunch date."

"Not if you're not interested. They're not that lovable, believe me. My thou per week was blood money, believe me, pure hemoglobin."

"I've got an idea," I said.

"That's hard to believe," said Al. "Proceed."

"Maybe they'll give my agency, Roux & Day, some business, and I needn't leave these premises where I have been so enchanted to these eighteen years. I can bring in some business, which nobody expects the head of a service department to do."

"Maybe you can," said Al.

"If I do, maybe even the head of our Cleveland office will write me a nice note."

"Well, you're the director—play it that way if you want."

"I want."

"Okay, then. It's the Colonial Room at the Carver—one o'clock tomorrow. They got the table. Same one every day. And if you want to make the right impression, don't take a drink—not even Mogen David on the rocks."

"My God, really?"

"Really. They frown on liquor. So long, and good luck."

"So long, and again, thanks."

I was dressed for the occasion. Dark suit. Somber tie. I had washed behind the ears, and although I bite my nails bad, I had a cuticle job the night before—with a nail scissors, that is. I still did not snow myself into thinking I looked much like the head of the 4 A's or top banana on the Harvard Club membership committee. I'm a sort of unkempt six-footer, carrying far too many pounds and far too little hair.



My school tie bears colors you never saw before and represents a small institution in Virginia you never heard of. Although I have the title of Vice President in Charge of Television, I never felt they'd reserve a window seat for me in the University Club. It's a good job—in a fine agency—in an exciting but tough business. It toys with the arts and messes with the mighty. That's why I loved it. And if I wasn't the smoothest looking man in the agency and Madison Avenue's Number One dreamboat—well, it's the best I can do. "To hell with the Partners," I coached myself as I padded through the thick carpet that leads up to the Colonial Room.

"Maybe they would rather have a diamond-in-the-rough type anyway," I thought as I sloshed along. But even that's tough because they'd insist on a fancier diamond. So again I said, "What the hell, it'll be a free meal, maybe an interesting bit of dialogue, and I'll go back to understudying accounts in the shop rather than trying to play the lead. So what?" But I had to admit I was nervous.

The Maitre d' was wearing a fancy whitish coat without a single gravy stain. He smiled in a way that looked more like a gas pain than deep-seated pleasure at seeing me. In my snottiest tone I said, "Mr. Karamaz's table."

"Yessir, this way," he said, fawning a little bit now as was befitting on a man who knew Mr. K. "This way, sir, they just arrived."

I had only about the length of a station break to survey the two characters at the table. I guess if I had to sum them up, I'd say what impressed me was how much they resembled each other—one older obviously—but still it was clearly a twin act. Both had dark hair, slicked back. Medium height. Not bad looking—for ogres.

Mert Karamaz—the older—was perhaps the personification of a Sneer. In fact, you might say he'd invented the facial expression and practiced it so long he now had it perfect.

It never left him—from the crinkles around his eyes to the way his mouth turned down at the corners.

Myron was, as I said, sort of a carbon copy—but not a good one. Maybe a kinescope would be better because it's a print of the real thing only grainy and distorted and a little blurred. That was Myron Essenger.

Clotheswise they must have bought two of everything. Black knit tie, tightly knotted and chastely held at the collar by a gold pin. Smooth silk drape suit, black as the king of spades. Silk shirt. All in all, they made the impression of a loud quietness, if you know what I mean.

"Howdy," I said. "I'm Roger Norden."

"Sit down," said Mert.

"Sit down," said Myron. And I did.

"Well," said Mert with a smile that was at least 50 per cent sneer, "we hear you're pretty good."

"Yeah," said Myron, "that's what we hear."

"I guess you've been talking to my mother," I said.

"We hear you know TV," said Mert, ignoring the yok I had tossed him.

"Yeah," said Myron.

"Well," I replied, "I've been at it since wrestling and roller derbies, and I've drawn a few conclusions."

"For instance?" said Mert.

"Yeah, for example?" said Myron.

"For one thing you folks have a turkey on your hands."

"Don't we know it," said Myron.

"Partner Myron is right," said Mert.

"For another thing," I went on, "the class you get in your print ads is lost when you go into TV. Partially that's the medium's fault. No color. No real finesse available. But partially it's your own."

"Go on," said Mert.

"You act like you were a different company when you hit

TV. You shout. You gouge. You get ugly. It's not necessary." I paused.

"Keep talking," said Mert.

"Why use a man?" I asked. "Get a girl with some class. Not too highbrow—but no slob. Not too pretty—so women won't resent her."

"You've got a point," said Mert.

"Yeah," said Myron.

"And speaking of points, where do you get those models? They're all uplift. You're not that way in print. What makes you so adolescent in television?"

"Good question, eh, Myron?" said Mert.

"Very good question," said Myron.

"What about our show?" asked Mert. "What should we do with it?"

"Junk it," I said. "As fast as you can get out of it. What does your contract read? Fifty-two weeks firm?"

"Don't worry about that."

"I'm not worried—but *you* should be. No escape."

"We can get out of any contract ever made," said Mert.

"We can and *will*," said Myron.

I should have thought about this. But I was warming up to my subject. The waiter took our orders. Mert ordered hamburger and gave detailed instructions on how it was to be prepared. You'd have thought he had asked for pheasant under glass.

Myron said, "Make it two."

I agreed so we could get back to the fray.

"I think you should get a *live* show. Film is too static for you. Then you should use *live* commercials—and keep them real *refeened*—but fill them with *news*. 'Now, girls, for the first time. . . .' 'Look what the House of Karess has just done for you. . . .' 'Announcing the most wonderful development. . . .' Make them *now* and *today* and *immediate*. That's

what style stuff needs—and do it *live*. Film ruins it.”

“Mr. Norden?” said Mert.

“Yes,” I replied.

“How’d you like to make one hundred thousand a year—*with* stock options?”

“That’s twice what you’re making now,” said Myron.

“Your espionage system let you down,” I replied. “Beg your pardon, but when you add up *all* my benefits, including free polio injections and the annual Golf Tournament at the Wackabuck Golf Club, it’s only forty-two thousand five hundred more than I now make.”

“We’re serious,” said Mert.

“We need an ad manager, and you’re it,” said Myron.

I fixed two beady eyes on the Partners—one on each. I was still acting cocky as hell.

“I think you *do* need me. I *know* I can help you gentlemen. I’d like to, in fact. But I want to help you for free. No need to cough up one hundred thousand or buy a new rug and waste any floor space. I want to work for you—and for free—from where I am.”

“How’s that?”

“From Roux & Day, Inc. Give us a good piece of the business. I’ll personally take charge of the TV end—copy, shows, time buying—all of it. No charge for me. Regular agency commission, that’s all.”

## *three*

Roux & Day is a large ad agency. Nevertheless, a ten-million-plus account was a huge account for us—a plum, as they say along Madison Avenue—not only for Roux & Day but for me, if *I* could handle it and solve their TV problems. If *not*, we'd be hearing the wiseacres pull the old chestnut, "They'll rue the day they went there."

In my twenty years at the agency—where I arrived with hair down to my eyebrows and a 28-inch waistline—this would be my toughest assignment. So what? It would also be my biggest break.

I charged out into the street—a stupid grin on my puss—and looked up and down the avenue for someone to talk to. Anyone to whom I could tell what had taken place. I was a picture of Sonny Boy busting with excitement. I had to spill it. But I saw no one.

"Calm down," my better judgment said to myself. "So, today you're the big shot. Tomorrow you'll be a bum. Level off those peaks! Avoid those valleys! Tote that barge. Lift that bale. Mammy's li'l baby loves shortnin' bread."

Actually, I'm convinced that I'm a manic-depressive, junior

grade. I compensate for this by telling myself one has to be in this business. I also have a dual personality. By day I am the Ad Merchant and TV Brainwave. By night I become Head Shrinker and give myself free treatments. This time I had to invoke the personality of Doctor Psychiatrist by day to get me out of the cumulus. It wasn't easy.

A combination of the walk, the cold air against my cheeks, and my do-it-yourself couchside manner managed to get me to the office of Harold Day, president of Roux & Day, Inc., in a fair degree of normalcy.

"Guess what!" I said to the dignified gentleman behind Clark & Gibby's most magnificent executive-type desk.

Harold Day looked up from a pile of papers. He was one of the deans of the ad game. An Old Pro. Forty-five years in the business. He remembered when factories had signs in their lobbies, "No solicitors, peddlers, or advertising men." He remembered when ad agencies contracted for space with the magazines and brokered it off to any and all comers for whatever they could.

But Harold Day was more than a founding father—or president of the agency for which I'd worked for eighteen years. He was the man who had hired me fresh out of college, wearing an English major across my wide-open face. I liked him. He liked me.

"Guess what!" I said looking like a tenderfoot who had just tied his first sheepshank.

"You turned down the job, and they offered you part of the account," said Harold looking up over the rims of his glasses.

"How'd you know?" I said.

"It figures, Rog."

"Well, I'll be—I wanted to surprise you."

"I know you too well to be surprised. But don't get me wrong. I'm mucho interested. Tell me about it."

"Well—as you said—they agreed to give us about ten million bucks of the account with custody of their television thrown in."

"They're smart."

"Yeah, but are we?"

"Let's think about that."

"What will it do to Roux & Day to get into bed with characters like Karamaz and Essenger? Everything you've ever heard about, read about, imagined about 'em is true—in spades. Believe me, Harold."

"I daresay," said Harold Day.

"What will it do to us? Will we have to change our spots to live with 'em? Will we have to lose what you and George have built up for years? And just as important, can we take the pace? We've never been in a league like this before."

"Let's think about it," said Harold Day. "What *good* can the account do us?"

"Well, there's the money obviously," I said.

"Less obviously, will it enhance our stature in the trade or will it chase business away from us—new accounts as well as old?"

"I think, Harold, anyone in television or even thinking of TV will say—if the Partners came to Roux & Day, they must have something. I think it'll build us."

"It could."

"I don't know about clients like old Tevis Wetherill of Consolidated Industries though."

"If we allow him to select our clients," said Harold, "we'll go out of business."

"We're sort of an old-shoe outfit," I said. "I think it'll be a shot in the arm to our own people. They'll like the publicity. They'll feel sort of proud. I think it'll make us better at our jobs."

"How much do they expect of you personally, Rog?"

"Plenty. I wonder if I can deliver. I wonder if anyone can."

"What do they ask?"

"Two things. The first is fairly easy—to get them out of a TV show which is contracted for on a firm fifty-two-week basis. Only a few weeks have elapsed."

"And you can do it?"

"Probably. But Number Two is the real toughie. To deliver a TV show to them that not only gets in the top ten fast, but that sells their merchandise and, though they won't admit it, makes them look like the Twin Wizards of Menlo Park. They want to boast. They want to flaunt their competition. They want fame. I can smell it—and nothing short of this kind of show will make them happy. In other words, they want the—"

"Almost impossible?"

"Correct. I don't know of such a show. I don't know if I or anyone else would recognize one if it came along. There've been only two or three since the medium started. The early Berle. 'Lucy.' 'Dragnet.' 'This Is Your Life.'"

"All you can do is try. If you want to."

"That's all—and I do."

"You're sure you want to take the physical beating?"

"I'm healthy as a horse."

"And the mental anguish—you'll have to be at their beck and call."

"I know. I'm only half as scared as I am confident, Harold."

"It's your decision."

I looked the man in those gentle blue eyes.

"I'd love it. So much so I can taste it. Taming the Partners will be my job. I can't wait to get at them."

"I thought so. And our present clients?"

"They'll grumble maybe. But I think even some of our industrial tycoons will look up to us."



"I hope so. Unless we become alley cats in the process."

"We'll take it then, Harold?" I said.

"You want it, Rog. Yes, we'll try it. And nice going!"

"I hope you'll feel that way a year from now."

"Shall we take our letter of employment over to them—or do you want to do it alone?"

"Let's treat them a bit stand-offish, Harold. Let's mail it to them."

Harold Day smiled.

"As you say."

I began to laugh like hell.

"What's the joke?"

"I'm thinking of what will happen when Merton Karamaz opens that envelope. He'll start reading the contract. Then he'll come to that wonderful last sentence of yours."

Harold Day closed his eyes and recited: "But the foregoing is merely an attempt to describe a meeting of minds, for the agency-client relation is one that must be based upon mutual trust and respect and cannot continue unless these are present. Therefore, this contract can be terminated at any time by either party upon receipt of written notice."

"Wait till he sees that," I said. "He'll call in a brace of lawyers. They'll spend hours trying to find out what the gimmick is."

"They may even get to like us when they find there isn't a gimmick," said Harold Day.

## *four*

"Who will we make account executive?" George Roux asked Harold Day in my presence. "Rog'll need plenty of help."

George referred to a list of account men in the shop and their current assignments.

"How about Van Rennsalaer?" he said. "I think we can free him from Union Drug."

"Too much of a Crew Cut," I said. "The Partners'll resent him so they'll cut him to ribbons."

"What about Lud Parsells?"

I shook my head again.

George Roux agreed with me on Lud.

We discussed a dozen men. Each one fitted into a category in my mind. I tried to picture the type as it would apply to the House of Karess.

There are about five basic types: "Good," of which there's a limited number in our shop or any other; "Crew Cuts" or "Princetons," of which we've got several assorted dozens; "Cretins," of which there aren't too many but enough; "Legacies," a group that is dying off, but not fast enough; and

"Eagle Scouts." I guess the only ones that need fuller explanations are the Princetons and the Eagle Scouts.

The former variety of agency *sapiens* didn't necessarily attend Princeton, though most of them actually did. If he didn't, his father did and the boy tried to. Or if neither of these cases applies, he looks like he did. For example, he gets his clothes cut too narrow at the ankles and frowns on padding and has a sort of nauseating clean-cut appearance surrounding a brain of birdlike dimensions. He is very social and quite often has his picture taken behind a Stork Club ashtray for Charlie Ventura's column. Also his name is invariably confused—his first name sounding more like a last—for instance, Landis Robert or Harrison John. A good man to have alongside on the squash court but a dubious entity in the market place, as the research boys put it.

The "Eagle Scout" type is, fortunately, not too common. However, it is said that every agency comes equipped with at least one Eagle Scout. This gent is a hybrid, combining the most idiotic aspects of a Cruise Director and Teddy Roosevelt. He bubbles over with enthusiasm like a cauldron of toads. He is "excited" by the "challenge" of an account. Every headline he takes to the client's office to sell you'd think was Shakespearean in its grandeur. But let one client dictate a change in these deathless iambs, and our boy folds like a tent, demonstrating great rivulets of enthusiasm for the client's suggestion (which I might add usually stinks and generally destroys the entire meaning of the ad).

Such a one—an Eagle Scout par excellence—was Euclid Avery, Nominee Number One for Account Executive to live with those gentle folks at the House of Karess. He was first of a long dynasty.

It was three minutes to 9 A.M. Euclid Avery and I, Roger Norden, were sitting pretending to read the newspaper in

the lush lobby of the House of Karess offices on Park Avenue and 38th Street.

The decor was rich and baroque, and the pile on the rug reached up and gently licked my ankles. Color photos of maidens clad in House of Karess creations looked languidly out of shadowboxes recessed in the walls. A large display window, I guess you'd call it—similar to the sidewalk jobs in Fifth Avenue department stores—was the center of attraction. For here, out in front of God, Euclid Avery, and Yours Truly, a plaster of Paris female wearing some kind of thing that looked like a nightgown sat crosslegged on a wildebeest. Okay, so I'm wrong. Maybe it was an antelope. Or an ibex. Anyway, it was the kind of animal Frank Buck used to bring back alive when I was a boy. And if Frank had known what fate his animals were coming to, he'd have stayed in Kenya with them.

Everything was not plaster of Paris and stuffed wildebeest in this cozy little harem, however. Oh, no. For within arm's length of where Euclid and I sat, nervously dipping into the news the *Times* figured fit enough for boys like us, was a real live one—a genuine girl-type receptionist, one of the specialties of the House of Karess.

She was a shadowbox queen come to life, if you could call such torpor life. High-cheekboned, she had russet hair done so cleverly that you wondered if Miss Clairol was her roommate. The little sign on the waist-high wall they'd erected around her, for self-preservation, obviously, revealed her name to be Miss Laverne Blaisdell. One might have known!

"Mr. Karamaz is expecting you, gentlemen?" inquired Laverne, managing to talk without the slightest show of expression or interest.

Our Eagle Scout rose to the occasion.

"Why yes, Miss Blaisdell. We represent your new adver-

tising agency," said Euclid jovially. "I guess we'll be seeing lots of each other."

What passed as Miss Blaisdell's eyes flickered slightly.

"Really!" she said.

I didn't feel I should interrupt the flow of dialogue, so I stuck my face back into the dependable *New York Times*.

Then I heard Laverne Blaisdell mumbling into her telephone.

Shortly there appeared from a marked doorway almost behind the wildebeest display another lady who said, "Will you come this way for Mr. Karamaz."

We did.

It was a long room with a long odd-shaped blond-veneered table in dead center. At one end sat Merton Karamaz. At the other sat Myron Essenger. I went over and shook hands with each, introducing Euclid Avery to them.

"So this is the one," said Merton staring at Euclid. "I don't know."

"This is him, eh?" said Myron. "I doubt it."

Euclid crushed their well-manicured fingers in his paw and stuck his jaw into their respective faces.

"Well, sir, this is a challenge. Yes, sir, this is an exciting challenge, and I want you to know I personally am all fired up."

He sounded like a take-off on Eddie Mayehoff.

Merton shook his head sadly.

So did Myron.

We took seats at the middle of the blond trapezoid. Then one by one men filed into the room. Neither Partner introduced them, so after a moment of embarrassing silence at each entry, Euclid and I introduced ourselves, our affiliation, our position, and, in turn, we met Merchandising Men, Factory Men, Research Men, Ad Men. Then she entered.

Her name was Mary Cranston. She was the stylist and

fashion coordinator. But I learned all this trivia later. When I first saw her, she was standing in the doorway to the Hall of Horrors with light from the room behind her chasing in and out of her blonde hair.

I guess there are those who might say her nose turned up a bit too much. Or that she had a bit too much of a jaw. Or that she was too solidly built to be Miss America. And maybe they'd be right. But whatever her dimensions, she was a living doll.

"My name is Rog Norden," I mumbled. "I'm vice-president in charge of television at the new ad agency."

She smiled and shook my hand like a man. Yet it was a soft and gentle hand like a girl's should be.

"Gentlemen," said Merton Karamaz, "before you begin the indoctrination of our new ad agency, I would like to make a statement on our basic philosophy about people—the people we work with. Does that sound reasonable, Myron?"

"A good idea," said Myron Essenger.

"We are in a rough business," said Merton Karamaz.

"Dog eat dog," interpolated Myron.

"For this reason we must be keen and lean and alert. Always! And how do we keep this way?"

"A good question," said Myron.

"By keeping in training. By keeping our fighting edge. By abhorring complacency, satisfaction, smugness, even with each other. So instead of the big happy family so many businesses profess to have, we pride ourselves on being more like a wolf pack. The fittest alone survive. So every person in this room is subject to the loss of his job tomorrow. Not two weeks hence. I emphasize tomorrow. There is no complacency here. For there is no numbing security. And, more important, every person here is not only expected but encouraged to find fault with his neighbors' operations in the company. The ad men *must* criticize the merchandise men,

and the designers *must* find fault with the advertising, and those in manufacturing *must* probe for the soft spots in the styling.

"Thus we all prosper. For let us state, Mr. Norden and Mr. Euclid—"

"Avery, sir," smiled our Eagle Scout broadly.

"Mr. Euclid," repeated Merton Karamaz, meaning "no interruptions." "We pay our people double what they would be making in like jobs elsewhere. For this we expect—we demand—complete obedience to our business philosophy. Right, Myron?"

"You couldn't be more right, Mert," said the other end of the table.

"Let me now describe the House of Karess look. This is our trade-mark. Yet unlike other trade-marks, which rely solely on trick words and phrases or insipid symbols like a hand holding a torch to show progress, or a drawing of the Rock of Gibraltar, our trade-mark is our product-personality. It is a mood. A feeling. An indescribable something. I will now portray it."

"You bet he will," said Myron.

"Every advertisement—whether in print or on television—every display—whether in stores or in our own showrooms—must have our own exclusive look. This is created in large measure by the models—alive or plaster of Paris.

"These are never just girls. They never look like somebody's sister—or the kid next door—or the kind of girl you'd like your son to bring home. They are, in a word, whores."

"You bet they are," said Myron, smacking his lips.

"However," said Merton raising his forefinger in a gesture that made him resemble Michelangelo's "Moses," "they are costly whores. Far out of the reach of Mr. Average Man. Not hundred-dollar whores. Not even five-hundred-dollar ones. The kind to whom and for whom a full-length mutation mink

and a Jaguar would be part payment for an extended relationship."

"A *white Jag*," said Myron.

"They are never seen in the daytime. They are never seen in modest surroundings. They are never seen in action. They are inactive, inert, immobile. Now—you might ask—why do we select such a type when we are selling to women—to the masses of women from Brooklyn to Santa Monica whose breasts sag and stomachs bulge and stockings droop and butts waddle and hair straggles and who are so tired they have to go to sleep at nine P.M. and whose idea of the place to go for entertainment is a two-bit neighborhood movie and a place to eat is a chop suey joint? Doesn't this breed hate our girl—resent her and us—and thus reject our products?"

"I was just going to ask that question," said Euclid Avery wreathing his jaw in a firm lovely smile.

"I'm glad you didn't," said Merton Karamaz snapping his mouth on each word like a ratchet. "You'd have been stupid if you had, Mr. Euclid. Because Mr. Euclid, any man who understands the psychology of advertising—or woman—" he nodded at Mary Cranston here—"realizes that the paper-plate-serving peasant from Canarsie with five kids and a slob for a husband is dying to look like a five-hundred-dollar whore. To live like one. To dress like one. And, my associates, do you know what is even more enigmatic?"

There was a silence. Myron—without a cue—couldn't fill the void. Euclid was also stunned.

I couldn't stand it any more so I spoke up.

"The fact that this creature *believes that it is possible* for her to look that way."

"Right," said Merton Karamaz, hitting the table with both fists so hard the ash trays bounced.

"That's our exclusive. Slut appeal! By God, *we alone* give



it to them." He got up and left the room followed by his partner.

No sooner had the Partners departed than we proceeded to the various offices of the other members of the firm who had been in the meeting to get from each the story of his department's functions as they pertained to advertising.

The last of these was Mary Cranston.

Mary had models come in one by one as she described the different lines of apparel. Then she went into the fabric story. Her voice was low and soft, yet it had a musical conviction. Her eyes lighted up as she talked. Her hands moved gracefully as she described the various ways in which synthetic fibers were woven with natural. As she moved from garment to garment—display to display—drawing to drawing—she moved with ease and confidence.

But more than all this, she had a charm about her. A poignance that radiated—and projected from her to her audience. Certainly to 50 per cent of it.

Fortunately, the other 50 per cent had to leave the room.

Brash as it may have appeared, I did it anyway, "By the way, Miss Cranston, do you have a lunch date?"

She seemed startled—but just for an instant.

"Well, as a matter of fact, I do—and I don't. I promised myself to take in the Marin show at the Modern Museum."

"Since it's the last day, I guess you'd better keep your promise," I said.

Her expression asked, "Now how did *you* know that?" I had expected as much.

"I've been twice," I said, "and you shouldn't miss it."

Her amazement was now tinged with doubt. I reached into my wallet.

"I've a Museum Card—and I'm kind of nuts about Marin.

His water colors—not his oils. I'd love to go again *if* you'd lunch with me in the members' dining room."

"Are there really oils in the show?" she asked.

It was a probing question. I was glad she asked it.

"Only on the first floor," I replied. "All the good stuff—the early water colors of New York City and the great Maine period—are upstairs. As far as I'm concerned, we could save time by avoiding the first floor."

This did it.

"Okay, I'd love to go with you," she said. "But I'd rather meet you in front of the place than walk out of here with you. The Partners—and your friend——"

Euclid Avery was returning.

I nodded.

"Twelve-thirty in front of the Museum. Now, about "Orlon," "Dacron," and natural fibers, Miss Cranston. . . ."

## *five*

At twelve-twenty-seven-thirty I was standing before the revolving door at the chaste front of the Modern Museum on 53rd Street. The sign jutting out from the building said JOHN MARIN—A RETROSPECT. Through the story-high glass panes I watched the usual complement of eggheads and students and art-loving ladies from Teaneck, New Jersey, in the lobby.

Then I saw her walking briskly toward me from the Fifth Avenue side.

"Hi," she said, "I'm on time. You must have been early."

"You're not implying I was inside boning up on the pictures so I could live up to the threat I made?"

She laughed. "No, of course not." He teeth were very white and even. A dentist's dream.

"Good," I said with a grin. "Because I noticed your incredulity when I showed a wisp of knowledge about Mr. Marin."

"That was awfully snobbish of me, wasn't it," she said. "I realized it right away."

"Well, don't let it bother you, Mary," I said. "By the way I intend to call you Mary rather than Miss Cranston."

"Of course," she said, "and you're Rog. What's your full name?"

"Roger. Ever since my mother shortened it to Rog I've been interested in this," I said, pointing to the Museum, which we were still standing in front of. "I guess it's because I have so little manual dexterity myself."

We walked through the door and over to the ticket booth. I showed my membership card and got tickets for two.

"What do you say we feed our stomachs first and then our souls?" I suggested.

"Fine," she said. And we took the elevator up to the penthouse floor.

"I don't see how you can say Renoir leaves you cold," Mary Cranston was saying.

"Because his stuff is sissy. Because it's effeminate. I can't take it. No guts."

"Nonsense, it's vibrant and rich and full of life. Why are you always on the lookout for the obvious in strength? What are you trying to prove?"

"I don't know, Mary," I said. "All I know when it comes to art, the Renoirs, the Laurencins, even the pastels of Degas leave me cold. When I like a landscape, it has to be somber and angular like Hartley did them. When it's a religious subject, it has to be strong like Roualt did 'em. That's just me, I guess, and I don't know why."

She laughed. "Well, don't let it worry you. It's curable."

I put her coat over my arm and we headed for the galleries. The sum total of my knowledge about the lady was increased by such facts as: her eyes were blue; she had a few freckles across the bridge of her nose; she came from Fort Madison, Iowa; and she lived with two other girls on upper Fifth Avenue in a huge rambling apartment that was quite a deal

if you got home before dark. Otherwise, it was a rough neighborhood to be navigating.

She learned that I had been married ten years ago—and divorced three months ago—a long, drawn-out, messy affair that left plenty of scar tissue on the patient. That I lived in a small suite at the Hotel Battersea on Lexington. That I liked fly fishing, bird shooting, the theater, and my job, as well as the watercolors of John Marin.

It was a most satisfactory hour and, when it was over, I asked if I could take her to dinner some night real soon. She said Yes as if she meant it and I walked back to the office without touching the sidewalk even once.

“Can I come over to see you, lad?”

The voice was unmistakably that of Kevin Antrim. I had known the man since I first was in broadcasting. When I was writing radio copy and jingles and doing odd-spot jobs in general some twenty years ago, Kevin was managing a few third-rate singers, fourth-rate announcers, and at the same time trying to bust into the network field with a packaged show.

Along the way he had succeeded several times. A quiz show or two and once a panel had lasted a couple of seasons, each of these epics ending its half-hour with the announcer’s comment coming fast over music and applause—this has been a Kevin Antrim Production under the personal supervision of Kevin Antrim.

The reason, in my opinion, that Kevin had never made the big time was not from lack of ability or judgment. It was simply that he had never been lucky enough. Several of his ideas, which he had taken all the way into audition-recording form (on someone else’s money to be sure), just missed being bought—or were scooped by one of the big

packagers. He missed out, but never by much. Just enough.

He did, however, know this business. His background had begun fifty years ago, since he was literally born backstage. Both his parents were vaudeville performers. To me, Kevin was always worth the time I could give him.

He had a wonderfully illuminated, crinkly-eyed, smiling countenance that always affected me the way a Bromo does when I have a hangover. Outside of his habit of using four-letter words in reckless profusion, regardless of who was within earshot, he was a pickup for me.

So I answered his query on the phone with, "Sure, Kevin. What's it all about?"

"If I tell you, m'boy, you'll deny me the audience."

"Don't be ridiculous. I'm just curious."

"You'll be curiouiser when I get there. It's my new show. An effing bombshell. Nielsen will have to make room on the top for it."

"Okay, c'mon over."

When Kevin arrived, he put on his most confidential manner. He pulled his chair around to my side of the desk. He was five-foot-two in his Adler Elevators. In a chair he looked like a circus midget. And despite his size he wore double-breasted suits in huge plaid designs with oversized lapels and big built-up shoulders. He leaned forward and put his round red countenance less than a foot from mine.

Then he whispered hoarsely, "Laddie, you an' I can set this effing business on its ear."

"A desirable goal," I said.

"Hush," said he, "and I've me talk. I have just come by the TV idea of the age. An adaptation of a family parlor game with certain overtones which I am adding that will be the biggest thing since Berle had the mejum all to himself."

"That's a modest appraisal."

"'Tis a fact. Now pay strict heed an' see if this won't set

all those ess-heel packagers you are used to dealin' with on their fat asses."

"Proceed."

"Remember 'Put 'n Take'—where you spun a little thing?" I nodded.

"There is your framework. Only instead of minor sums we play for big ones. I've worked it out so a contestant can take home half a million dollars. Over a twenty-week period, that is."

"I'm glad you mentioned the time element."

"Ah yes! That spreads it out nicely. And there's more than just money—"

"Is there more?"

"Sartinly. I've done a great deal of research and some test runs of the thing. This country, m'boy, is filled with learned men and women in all walks of life."

"Hownice," I said.

"Ah, an' they are in the most outlandish positions—truck drivers who know atomic science, farmers who know art, coal miners who know the ultimate in opera, little old ladies who are hep to fisticuffs, children who know Shakespeare. 'Tis a revelation!"

"And what happens when you present these little people with their big knowledge before the public?"

"Everything! You and I sitting home are vindicated. We feel their triumph. What a framework for a sponsor's product. D'you see?"

"I do!" I said.

"An' the money works out well. By spreading the game over weeks, we keep from putting out too much green stuff too fast and—"

"And by bringing contestants back week after week, you heighten the suspense," I said.

"Precisely!" he replied beaming. It was the first word he

uttered aloud. "I knew you were the one effing agency man who'd get the essential values of it."

"I am. I do," I said. "Have you kinescoped it yet?"

"Ah, there's the rub."

"I know—money. But you said you'd gotten a feel of audience reaction."

"Only dry runs of it. In my own home. In a rehearsal hall once."

"How much do you figure to do a full-scale half-hour kinnie?"

"About four Gees."

"You can do it for under twenty-five hundred. Use an organ instead of a band. A few other economies. Suppose I get Roux & Day to advance the money against a sale?"

"Ah, would you, Rog?"

"In return for room to turn around. I want an eight-week exclusive option from the day the print leaves the lab."

"Eight weeks! But the selling season will be over. I'll give you two. My boy, with your persuasiveness an' this show, you'll sell it in a day."

"I'll take a four-week option and send the check to you this afternoon."

"Agreed."

"Be on your effing way," said I, shaking his hand.

"I want to talk to you about a television show." The speaker was myself. I was addressing my remarks to the Partners in Merton's office.

"We will listen," said Merton.

"Our ears are wide open," said Myron.

"But before I do, I want to get a couple of things straight. First, that television is the biggest gamble of all media. You put your dollars into the *Post* or *Life* and you *know* what you



get—how many readers, circulation, pass-along readership, and so on. But not with TV.” I paused.

“This is not very revealing,” said Merton.

“It wasn’t intended to be,” I came back at him. “I just wanted to recall to you what you already know because I’m going to ask you to gamble.”

“Since *we* take all the risks,” said Merton, “what are the odds?”

“I take them, too,” I said looking him right in between those narrowed eyes. “I risk the account for my agency—I risk my reputation—and since I am frank to admit I become emotionally involved in my work, I risk a lot of blood. So you gentlemen have company in the gamble.”

“Not very much,” said Merton. “What are the odds?”

“Long! Very long,” I replied. “Not much longer than on any new show. But a bit longer because this one’s different.”

“It sounds artistic,” said Merton gloomily.

“It sounds awful,” said Myron.

“Now hold your water, both of you,” I said. I was getting mad. I wanted them to know it. I wanted them to realize I meant what I was saying.

“You haven’t heard a damn thing except what you already know—and have already accepted three times before in going into network TV—and already you’re turning yellow. Now please shut up till I’ve finished. Then you can rant and rave. During the discussion period.

“I said this show—even more than most—was a gamble. It can be a flop—but on the other side of the coin, it has the makings of a huge success. Not just a fat rating. Not just some nice slop from the critics. Or the fact that your wives will boast about it at the Thursday Bridge Luncheon. This little item can go through the roof—excite the country, goose the retail trade like they never felt it before, and move the

merchandise displayed tonight out of the stores tomorrow A.M.”

“This is more like it,” interrupted Merton Karamaz. “It is precisely why we hired you.”

I ignored the interruption.

“A man whom I’ve known in the business for twenty years, an old-timer who was a vaudevillian, then a radio packager, but who never got off the ground in television, came to see me with an idea. It wasn’t new—but it was a twist on something. It’s sound as hell—and he’s going to kinescope an audition of it tomorrow. He’s given me first refusal on the show. In fact, I advanced him two Gees out of Roux & Day’s money to get the thing going. I want you both to join me at it at nine P.M. tomorrow, Studio Eight F at East Fifty-third Street.”

“For God’s sake, don’t be so secretive,” pleaded Merton, “tell us something about it.”

I laughed at him. Then at his Partner.

“I’ll tell you this. It’s based on the principle that we Americans are the most money-mad creatures in the world. And—as an overtone—we’re secretly self-conscious that we aren’t very bright. We’re looking everywhere for proof that I, Mr. Average Joe, am really brilliant. That’s all—dough and empathy—and I think it’s enough, knowing the way Kevin Antrim will stage it. See you tomorrow at nine.”

I stalked out. I’ll bet it was a full five minutes after I left that Merton Karamaz closed his mouth. Six for Partner Myron Essenger.

## *six*

Mary met me at La Boite, which is on West 58th Street and, in my opinion, is the best restaurant in New York. That's partly because the food is great and partly because Guillaume, the head man, always seems glad to see me. Being known by name in a New York restaurant is somewhat like getting a Nobel Prize.

Guillaume would hover over me, fixing a salad, making the crepes suzette himself, or just worrying about whether I was going to get ptomaine. This kind of attention usually impressed the girl I was with and always impressed the hell out of me.

Guillaume bowed and fawned and pronounced my name in his most Parisian accent while he ushered us to a table in the darkest corner of the establishment. The darkest corner in La Boite is only slightly darker than the Black Hole of Calcutta. A lone candle flickered on the table, vaguely revealing the roccoco decor of the joint to best advantage.

I ordered drinks and the food for us both and a bottle of wine developed by monks, Guillaume assured me, during a most propitious year.

Mary had some kind of little hat on and a bolero-type thing which she took off. Her neck and shoulders were of the right year too as far as I was concerned.

"How are you making out with my employers?" she asked.

"So far so good," I said. "They still listen."

"The more they listen, the more they learn. And the more they learn, the less they listen."

"I realize that. So I figure my tenure is limited. But in the meantime, it's sort of fun. Makes me feel smart."

"Do you need reassurance?"

"Hell, yes. I'm not really as cocky as I sound. God, if I were, I'd be unbearable to myself."

Mary laughed. "You are an enigma," she said.

"Not much of one really."

"Well, then, explain to me why you're always making jokes—if you do have a normal person's qualms."

"Because in my racket, honey, opinion is our only criterion *before* we make a move. And the people I deal with are so uninformed I *have* to force my views on them to get something done. If I show any doubt—even the slightest wavering in what show or piece of talent or time slot I believe in—the deal's off. Deader than the brontosaurus."

"But you do have confidence in your decisions?"

"Absolute confidence. I have to. I'm playing in the world's greatest roulette game—picking shows for TV—yet I honestly feel any decision I arrive at can't miss."

"Have you ever?"

"A couple of times. My batting average is pretty good though."

"What happened when you were wrong?"

"In one instance we lost the account. Two million bucks—and we'd had it eight years."

"That didn't shake you up?"

"A bit, but I was still convinced the idea was right. A hot

musical group on film with sort of a thin story line. It was the executive that was wrong. But a great man—and a wonderful friend—really gave me the ability to forget the thing.”

“Who was that?”

“Harold Day, our president. What a guy.”

“If the president didn’t care about the loss—”

“Oh, he cared—and plenty. It was an account he’d brought in. But I guess he cared more about me and how I’d feel, so he took me out to dinner the night we got the news they were moving to another agency and got me loaded—as well as telling me I’d been right.”

“What a marvelous thing to be able to work for a man like that.”

“It’s worth all the dough in Merton and Myron’s secret cash accounts—and then some.”

“With a man like that behind you, you should never worry.”

“Oh come now. I’d have to be an anthropoid to be that insensitive.”

“Well, what else does it?”

“In the first place, I worry about television itself. Is it getting lousier and lousier, and am I at fault? Can I help to improve it and still be a commercial success in it? In other words, must this business of sponsorship—of cost per thousand homes reached per commercial minute—must it keep lowering and lowering the level of the medium?”

“Must it?”

“I’m not sure. Sometimes I think so. Other times I see a ray of hope—for instance when we do something by Shaw or Thornton Wilder, and they’re rated successes as well as *fine* productions.”

“They’re few and far between though.”

"I know. But maybe I myself can make them less and less far between."

"Funny I never considered television worth caring about. Any more than I cared about the funny papers or slick magazines. Or radio for that matter."

"You've got to care. Everyone with a brain in his head has to. This is a potent thing—television. Either we use it to reach all our people wisely. Or we piddle it away. In a democracy we can't afford to misuse our means of mass communication."

I looked at her. I guess I've said before she was beautiful. Let me say it again.

"I sound like I ought to be up on a soap box," I continued.

She shook her head. "No. I asked. Can't a man and woman talk intelligently?"

"I guess so. But I don't want to bore you."

"You don't."

"What about you? I've been delivering the monologue. How'd you get to work for the Precocious Partners, and what's it like and what do you hope it leads to?"

"Well, let's start back in Iowa. I went to the State University and majored in art, fashion, styling, and so on. I was always fascinated by clothes, even as a little girl. I used to keep a scrap book of pictures of costumes I'd clip out of anywhere. I once cut all the costume pictures out of a new encyclopedia my father had just bought."

She laughed.

I did too.

"I guess he wasn't too happy about that."

"No, but Dad was an understanding person. He taught in our local high school. Could have gone much further than that. In fact, he had dozens of college offers, but he figured his place in life was in the town he was born in."

"Sounds like a great guy."

"He was. He died last year. Within six months of my mother. In fact, I think that's what caused it. He hadn't been sick or anything. They sent me to a fashion school in New York as soon as I got out of the University, and I applied for a job at Karess with the help of the school and I got one."

"You didn't start as coordinator?"

"No, of course not. That was three years ago. With a combination of luck and the girls ahead of me leaving for other positions, I got where I am now. And I love it."

"Don't the Partners ever give you any trouble?" I said. "I can't imagine they're unaware that you're attractive. Or that they employ you."

Mary smiled. "I can take care of myself."

"I don't doubt it. But do they ever pursue you singly or en masse?"

"Not to speak of. Except for Myron asking me to go away for a week end with him, I've never had any trouble."

"The old rake," I said. "When did he do that?"

"Every week or so. But I think he'd drop in a dead faint if I accepted. He just asks expecting me to refuse."

"And he doesn't make your job tougher because you won't go?"

"To the contrary," said Mary. "You men never understand each other. If I *went*, my job would be unbearable. If he didn't care to ask me, it would be worse. This way it's just right."

"I guess I don't understand."

"You don't have to."

We were finished with dinner.

I signed the check.

"What now?" I asked her.

"I want to make it an early evening. Come on up to our place. You can meet my roommates, have one drink, and I'll send you trundling on your way."

"Fine, I'm tired, too. Also, I like to meet roommates. I test them against my warped theories."

There is a species of female indigenous to New York City known as My Roommate. And like all species they vary. But not much. Mary Cranston had two of the most typical: (a) the Ugly One and (b) the Esthetic One. Every good-looking doll in our fair town has one like (a)—the kind that's described as plain-looking or a nice girl.

Liza Maxwell was not only plain, but she was a bore—a clinging bore. She seldom went anywhere without Mary—but Mary never seemed to mind.

She also hailed from some God-forsaken hamlet out West and had come to the Big City to make a name for herself in the world of art. She was presently employed drawing greeting cards. The clever kind that you send to a person who has just gotten his third divorce. A card for every occasion. A card to express your personality. A card to show you care. Liza drew them from nine to five, with an hour out for lunch, five days a week. Just the drawings—the cute-cute ideas were all supplied by a covey of cute-idea thinker-uppers on staff as well as by free-lance contributors.

"I bet you didn't realize there are people all over our country who spend their spare time thinking up clever greeting card ideas, Mr. Norden?" said Liza to me shortly after we had gotten by the amenities.

"No," I said. "It's wonderful to think what a creative race we are."

Mary gave me a glance of you-know-what.

"Well, Mr. Norden, I happen to think it's creative work," said Liza archly.

"Call me Rog," I said.

Roommate Number Two, Betty McAllister, the Esthetic One, was going to acting school, studying the Group



Method. She was rather lofty about the Legitimate Drayma and, of course, my chosen field was the lowest art form yet developed.

"I find television deplorable," she confided in me.

"Thank you," I said.

"Well, I don't mean to imply it's your fault, Mr. Norden."

"I appreciate that," I said. "But if we're going to fight about the arts I'd prefer that you called me Rog too."

"Certainly," she said with a sweep of her hand, a gesture she had learned from Geraldine Page.

"Do you get much time for the theater?" she asked.

"As a matter of fact, I do," I said.

"It's nice to see people support the last art form we have left."

"Isn't it," I said. "Well, I figure I owe it to the Muses. You see I spend so much of my time clobbering them in the twenty-one-inch size."

Mary stepped in and parted us. "Come on, Rog. I told my roommates you were intelligent. Also nice."

"I guess you told a fib."

Mary laughed. "This man, girls, is a living lie. He's afraid of admitting he likes art—the theater—Lord knows what else."

The roommates nodded sagely.

"However, I do own up to making a masterful stinger," I said. "I will demonstrate while you girls digest my biography."

## *seven*

The glass-fronted sponsor's booth on the floor above Studio 8F looked out on about five hundred samples of what George Roux called The Great Unwashed Masses. They had gathered from the four corners of the country. They were always present by the thousands in the Big City, ogling the tall buildings, queuing up at first-run movies, riding the subways for adventure, and in general taking in what might make good conversation back home in Kansas.

At one end of the room was a stage, and it was alive with boom microphones and cameras and camera crews with assistant directors wearing walkie-talkies and stage hands carrying chairs and script girls carrying scripts. A typical ant palace of off-camera people that made up a television show whether that show was a simple formatted two-man interview or a full five acts from Oberammergau in compatible color.

An announcer-type chap was "warming up" the audience as the Partners and I took our seats inside the booth. An attendant in full network regalia flipped open the sound so we could hear the proceedings on the other side of the glass and then he began to mess with the test pattern on the

monitor. From here we could see the studio audience, hear their reaction—or lack of it—as well as watch the video of the show as it was being kinescoped. In addition the kinnie would be processed within forty-eight hours and we all could screen it at our leisure which would give us a far better perspective for judging its merits—or lack of them.

This was always a tense moment for me, especially when the show was my responsibility—comparable to the moment before the curtain goes up in the theater. Something always reached inside of my stomach and grabbed hold, hung on, and twisted.

“How many of you are happily married?” asked the baboon who was leering out at the audience. A hundred hands went up.

“How many of you are *unhappily* married?” Laughter shook the studio audience. They’d have to remember that one for Uncle Silas when they got back to Elephant’s Breath, Kansas.

A hollow voice from the control room silenced the whimsy and the laughter. “Two minutes to go. Get ready to give us the intro, Harry. Take a hand cue from me, Marco.”

Marco was the little dark chap seated at the Hammond organ. I’d worked with Marco since way back in the days of radio. It was his function to perform as cut-rate music and for musical bridges throughout the opus. The show if sold and if produced would of course have a full orchestra. But for the kinnie, Marco was enough.

“Fifteen seconds — ten — five — four — three — two — hit it, Marco,” come from the control room, and the organ gave forth with a fanfare that sounded very soap opera.

For the next half hour a scholarly MC, introduced as the Dean of some Midwestern college, awarded thousands of dollars to contestants answering questions ranging from geography to atomic energy. Since this was only an audition, the

numbers were considerably scaled down when the contestant actually received his or her loot (as pre-arranged in an iron-clad agreement drawn up by the shrewdest lawyer in show business). But the studio audience didn't know the difference; they cheered, and whistled, and stamped the floor. It was apparent the show had something. The type of person who was doing the answering was part of it—a tough old truck driver on the subject of atoms, a little girl of eight on geography. Here was excitement—here was ready identification for the mob in the studio—and, I felt sure, for the old folks at home all across America.

Each week the contestant was to come back and risk his winnings to go to the top of the game—a cool half a million bucks. Here was suspense. Here was drama. I felt it, the Partners did, too. And so did the folks on the other side of the glass.

Marco and his organ struck up the final chords of the half hour, and I said to my companions, "Let's go outside and wait for Kevin. He'll join us over a drink. I've got a few ideas about the show, and I want to see how he reacts."

"I'd like you to meet Merton Karamaz and Myron Essenger, Kevin. This is Kevin Antrim." I was offering the amenities in a dark little bar around the corner from where the kinnie had been made, a hangout for denizens of our fair trade, which meant that some wise-boy, seeing me with the Karess Partners plus Mr. Antrim, would deliver a thousand well-chosen words to *Variety* about the House of Karess's new TV venture. But it couldn't be helped. This was a business of rumor, counter-rumor, and planted news, all of which, devoid of fact or not, was gobbled up by the trade.

Kevin stuck out his freckled hand and grinned at the two men across the table. "Heard an effing lot about you two," he said.

Merton was a bit taken aback at the Elizabethan terminology. However, he managed to smile. Myron just squirmed.

"Well, I think we got something," said Kevin rubbing his hands.

"Stop selling, son," I said to him quietly. "What you've got needs plenty of work—if it'll go at all."

"Now that, my boy, is a crock of ess and you know it, Rog. This thing is tree-menjous." Kevin always got very Irish when his dander was up. "When my poor auld father was trodding the boards in one-nighters he used to tell me that eye-dentification was the thing. Give the suckers someone in whom they see themselves. An' we've got it here, me bucko. You're effing well told it's in this quiz."

"It's there, Kevin. But it's buried," I said. "There's one thing in the show now that's so wrong it'll kill the idea dead. And you can't see it—but I can."

"All righty—what? I'm listenin, Rog. I know you know this effing business. Give."

"Not until we discuss price."

"Oho, so you won't talk until we shave the cost. Is that it?"

"That is precisely it, Kevin. And you know me well enough to know I'm not snowing you about a basic weakness in the show or that I can fix it."

Kevin shook his head sadly. Then he leaned forward and spoke to the Partners. "The s.o.b. is right. I know it. But the in-fair-mation'll cost me a lotta doubloons."

"You're asking thirty thousand net a week," I said. "The show isn't worth it. There's much too much water in that."

"Now lookee here, Rog. Don't be such a conniving bastard. There's the prizes. Half a million dollars top."

"I know, my boy. I figured it all out in detail last night. With proper control over winners—well spaced out—your prize-money costs should average at the outside about ten thousand a week. Not more, possibly less."

"Control!" squealed Kevin. "Why it's a game of skill—a contest of wits—and may the best man win. What effing control do I have over that?"

"Calm down, son, I'm not a child. You've control over the questions, the contestants, the timing, the spacing of the contestants, and, therefore, as complete control over the results as does the director of a dramatic show."

Kevin was crushed. He knew I knew. The Partners were bug-eyed.

"But what about research on questions? And the whole staff of nation-wide searchers for brain-powered contestants?"

"A couple of four-thousand-dollar college pros will be glad to pick up some change—and some outfit like INS or UP will take on the search on a national basis for two bills a week each."

"Jay-zuz, you are a complete one hundred per cent s.o.b.," said my pal.

"This show should cost twenty-three five and allow you to make a very lovely penny *if* it goes."

"Jay-zuz," was all Kevin could say. He knew I had him.

"Agreed?"

"Okay, you effing s.o.b. But I still love you!" We shook hands.

"Fine, then let's proceed to something constructive. The MC."

"An' what is wrong with Dean Arbuthrock? He is a genu-wine college dean from that genu-wine Midwestern college the name of which escapes me. An' even an idiot at home can tell this is a very learned man from the strange way he talks and the square way he looks. An' what, pray tell, is wrong with Dean Augustus Arbuthrock, a new type of TV MC with some effing class for a change?"

"Precisely the attributes you gave the man. He is cold,

erudite, dull—and as a matter of fact your own father's words will lead you to a completely different type of MC."

"Now what has my father to do with Dean Arbuthrock?"

"Identification—that's what the MC must bring to this show. Your man is a barrier—a wall between humble me sitting at home and the contestant."

The Partners leaned forward.

"Now, I admit you did the obvious, Kevin. A show to test the intellect—get a professor to MC it. Seemed perfect, didn't it?"

"'Tis perfect!" stormed Kevin.

"'Tis not," I said. "It's all wrong. What you want here—for the go-between—is a shnook. A nice-looking young lame-brain. He can't know an answer, and when he reads one you have to feel he didn't know. He must react—honest amazement when your cab drivers and grease monkeys and little old ladies cough up their wisdom. In other words, he must be Me. That will build the empathy. This egghead destroys it."

I sat back in my chair. There was a moment of silence. The Partners looked at one another. Kevin glared at me.

"Well, maybe," he said. "But if you're so effing smart, who'll we get? One of those high-priced quizmasters that's on two other shows like Ralph or Bud or Bert——"

"Of course not. I agreed with your attempt to get a fresh face. Someone who isn't a bouncy, brittle, over-exposed TV type—"

"Yeah, but who?"

"I'll get him for you. I have one in mind. He's a night-club MC and hooper. He opened in a play in New Haven last week. I saw him there. He'll come to Broadway next week, and it'll close in five performances. We'll wait for that unhappy event."

“Good, then he’ll be cheaper.”

“Precisely,” I said.

The Partners beamed. The meeting was at an end.



## *eight*

My fourth date with Mary Cranston began during a blizzard.

I rang her apartment about six o'clock that evening. It was snowing hard and had been for hours. Already city transportation was at a standstill and things were getting worse. Or getting better depending on your point of view.

"Who's this?" she said.

"Television's greatest off-camera personality," I replied. "I am calling to find out what program you are listening to."

"It's you, Rog," she said.

"You sound disappointed."

"To the contrary. Isn't it awful out?"

"Nope," I said.

"What do you mean?"

"Just this. I was given two tickets—third row center—to *My Fair Lady* for tonight. And you are the only person I'll take. I'd tear them up before I'd go with someone else."

"Stop," said said. "I thought you'd seen it."

"I have. Opening night with a pair of gastric, elderly, unfeeling clients."

"But the weather," she protested. "Look at it. There are

about eight inches already on the ground and the weather report says it'll keep on for hours."

"Great, I hope so," I said. "The city never looked better. If you'll put on ski pants, ski boots, and start walking down the middle of Madison Avenue, I'll do the same. We'll meet half way and then mush onward to the Mark Hellinger Theater—oh, pioneers!"

"Sounds like fun."

"I guarantee it. We can eat dinner somewhere real fancy-shmancy after the show. That is, if they'll accept us in ski clothes!"

"I've got a better idea, Rog," Mary replied. "We can walk back here. And I'll make us dinner."

"Isn't that too much trouble?" I asked.

"No," she replied. "There are chops in the ice box and I make a real professional Caesar salad, and—"

I interrupted. "And I'll take care of the martinis."

"Gourmet!" she said.

"What about those hollow-legged roommates of yours? I guess I'd better bring two bottles of gin."

"They're not home," Mary replied. "Liza got marooned out in Jersey, and Beth is staying downtown for the night."

"Mother Nature, I love you," I said.

A heavy snowfall does things for New York City no painter could get away with. It repaves the broad dirty avenues, and it buries the filth of the narrow crosstown streets. Orange peels and beer cans and black soot disappear beneath a counterpane of white magic.

But wonderful as it all is, it can't last long. For the steam pipes beneath the streets never relent in their battle to return the orange peels to their rightful place. The constant pounding of hot tire treads and Neolite soles also conspire to release the native ugliness from its white prison. Soon

New York becomes New York once more. But in the meantime:

Mary Cranston walked south through our strange white city and I walked northward. I was wearing hunting boots, canvas britches, a leather jacket, and felt sort of like Lawrence of Arabia or Sir Wilfred Grenfell with a dash of Rudolph Valentino thrown in.

The Mark Hellinger Theater was half empty that night—which meant we felt as if we had Rex Harrison and Julie Andrews playing to us alone. From the overture to the last breath-taking moment where Liza Doolittle sneaks back into the Professor's home and fetches his slippers, Mary and I sat with our shoulders touching and our hands in each other's.

Several times during the performance I took my eyes from the stage to look at her sitting beside me—to watch the way her eyes lit up at the antics of Harrison and the wit of the lines given him. Her face suffused with delight as Liza came forth gowned for the ball and during the vivid Rain in Spain gambit. Then it was over.

We shook ourselves from the deliciousness of our mood.

"There should be a law. No one should be allowed to see this show who isn't in love," said Mary, as we began our trudge to her place.

That was the way I felt too.

The cold was reddening her cheeks.

"How faithful to Shaw they were with the story," she said as we walked eastward from the theater.

"Smart, weren't they?"

"Even to the lyrics—for example, that lovely thing 'I've Grown Accustomed to Your Face'—it came right out of a line of Shaw's dialogue."

"How'd you know that?"

"I was reading *Pygmalion* only last week."

"God, you're intellectual," I said.

"Come on now," she said, slinging a handful of snow at me. "Another of your poses. The nonintellect. The business dumb-ox."

"You have unmasked me," I said.

"Nonsense—and stop trying to hide it."

"Yes. From now on I shall speak only in iambic pentameter," I said contritely.

It took an hour and forty minutes to navigate the sixty blocks. We were bushed but glowing, and as soon as I had gotten out of my boots and heavy outer garment I put a match to the lovely phoney logs in the lovely phoney fireplace, which pimpled all over with silly green and blue flames. Then I went about the business of constructing a pitcher of the driest martinis ever made by man.

This complete, I took an example of my work in to Mary, who was busy in the kitchen. She had a gingham apron tied around her middle and a man's blue oxford shirt open at the neck and fuzzy-furred white slippers on. Her high cheekbones were glowing from the walk and her blue eyes shone.

I put my forefinger under her chin and tilted it. Then I put my lips against hers. Just my lips. She closed her eyes and pressed her lips upward. We stayed that way for a full minute. It was I who pulled away and did so almost violently.

"Why, Rog?"

"Because I'm worried."

"Stop playing a role."

"No, I mean it," I said. "I don't want to fall in love. It means leading with one's chin."

"Is that so dangerous?" she said coming over to me and putting her palms on my face.

"It could be," I said. "I did it once."

"You sound like the 'Late Late Show,'" said Mary and she smiled, and I guess she was right.

"Let's sit on the floor, Rog, and eat from the coffee table by the fire."

I nodded.

"To New York!" I said holding my martini up high. "Where else could you scare up a private snowstorm that is so delightfully disruptive—and be alone with a girl like you?"

"To New York," said Mary, "my first love!"

"Mine, too," I echoed.

"My love is deeper," said Mary. "You're a New Yorker impressed with the featured players. But to a little girl from Iowa, it's the commonplace things that make you love her."

"For instance," I said.

"For instance, the opportunity to be a person. At home you are always a part of things—a doting family, a church group, an effort to be literary or speak French or bring Living Theater to Our Town. You are never left by yourself—treated as an adult human being in a world of adults."

"I drink to Adultery—New York's greatest of gifts."

"Don't jest, you degenerate, unfeeling fool," she said putting her check against mine. "The anonymity New York allows me is worth all the gold in Fort Knox."

"I'd trade it for that."

"I wouldn't. You don't know what a thrill it is to have an apartment doorman nod at you and say, 'Good morning, miss'—adult words addressed to an adult person. Or a cab driver to look at you and say, 'Where to, miss,' all the while considering you to be mature enough to decide on your own where to go, when to return, and what to do while there." She sighed deeply.

"I understand," I said pecking at her cheek.

"Understanding it is only half the fun. Feeling this way is the rest. Feeling free, on my job where I must stand toe-

to-toe with men—tough ones, some nasty, some suave, some conniving, some lecherous, but men—men as they are. New York City men—not those little bits of patchwork quilt that were the men I knew before I came here.”

“Which am I, Fair Lady?”

“You are all of them. Nasty when you have to be, suave when it seems appropriate, conniving because your job insists on it.”

“And lecherous?”

“I’m afraid so.”

“Yum, yum,” I said filling her glass again.

“See what I mean?” she smiled up at me as she sipped her drink.

“I want you, Mary,” I said.

“I know,” she replied. “I want you.”

“And you’re not scared?”

“A little—but not enough to stop me.”

I got to my feet and pulled her to hers. Without letting go of her hand, I led her to the bedroom. It was dark and cold and the window was slightly open. Where it was open an inch of snow had drifted in. An intruder—and yet a friend.

We took our clothes off in the dark and slid beneath the covers.

## *nine*

We were in my office.

Merton Karamaz and Myron Essenger and I were about to screen the print of "The Put 'N Take Quiz." It was quite an event, getting the Partners out of their own lair. I had told them that the only place I'd show it to them was away from their phones and in private. Even Kevin was to be barred.

They had arrived at the agency looking as suspicious as house dicks in a little-theater production. The girl at the reception desk had been cued, and upon arrival they were greeted with warmth and dispatch and alacrity.

Before they had a chance to complain or make a phone call, I had them seated and the lights off.

"You're going to like this," I said, "because it has all the elements we hoped for. Everything we felt in person up at the studio. It takes a day or two to get your perspective—to see if you're right. That's why I like to look at a kinnie."

"No more lectures, please," said Merton.

"Yeah, let's see the movie," said Myron.

I ignored them.

"I want you to realize there are plenty of rough spots. First, of course, the MC. Second, not enough close-ups so we

can liven the tension and the excitement and share the triumphs with the contestants. Too much talk on the game—”

“Too much talk here,” said Merton.

I was determined to finish.

“After we screen this,” I said, “I’ll have to keep you for about an hour more.”

“But we’re jammed up,” shrieked Merton.

“I’ve eight people waiting,” echoed Myron.

“This will be as important an hour as you’ve spent in your business lives,” I said. “I have three things to discuss—first, how you’re going to get out of your present show commitment—”

“We’ll stay,” said Merton.

“All day,” said Myron.

“—second, the use of one of your employees as TV spokeswoman for the House of Karess—”

“What!”

“Who?”

“—third, you’re going to meet your new account executive.”

“Oh my God,” moaned Merton.

“Likewise,” said his Partner.

I flipped the switch on the projector and the film began to roll. “The House of Karess proudly presents—the most novel idea in give-aways, Put ‘N Take.”

Thirty minutes later the show was over.

I flipped the sound off and the lights on.

“Normally,” I said, “I don’t wait for anybody’s reaction. I jump in with my own. It seems to be infectious.”

“But now you are asking our opinion?”

“Yes, because I am confident. Confident of your judgment as well as my own. I know you, too, can see the finished product and the power it has to build week after week into a TV-viewing habit.”



"If you are asking my opinion, you will please refrain from expressing it," said Merton.

"Yeah, shut up," said Myron.

"I like it," went on Merton. "I like it a lot. It's people—as they want to see themselves. Smart. In the wrong job. Studious. Humble, yet brilliant. God what a lie—but what a show!"

"Well," I said, "I must admit that's as good a critique as I've heard. And your view, Myron?"

"It's a pace-setter."

"Agreed! Now, we may be wrong," I said, "but anyway it has a chance. A good one."

"It's live," went on Merton. "Not some damn film. It's here and now. Just right for our commercials. Fashion copy must be live and here and now."

"I'm glad you brought up the commercial copy. I want to come back to it in a minute."

"I'm busy. I ought to be getting along," said Merton.

"Me, too," said his Partner.

"Before you do, Part Number Two in this very informal but instructive seminar is how to get out of a contract you gentlemen signed—through the good offices of one of your present agencies—which ties you in for a full year to a clinker."

"This we know," said Merton.

"This we want to know how to end," said Myron.

"I am coming to that. I want, first, to emphasize that your signature, Mr. Merton Karamaz, appears on a document that binds you until September of next year to a show called 'Melodrama Playhouse,' a UBC package on the UBC network. Correct?"

"Why remind us?"

"For good reason. Now to keep your heads above water in

the business community, an expedient as well as a point of honor, you must live up to this contract. Unless—”

“Tell us the unless,” begged Merton.

“Unless the UBC *wants* to let you out. And why should they do that?”

“A good question,” said Merton.

“Give us a good answer,” said Myron.

“Only because they want something *more*,” I said.

“I begin to see some light,” said Merton.

“I don’t,” said Myron.

“If—and I emphasize the ‘if’—the program people at UBC can be convinced that their network *must have* Put ’N Take, we may find an out.”

“How do we do this?”

“You don’t,” I said. “I do. And I already started things by whetting the appetite of their competition, namely, the MBC network.”

“The light grows brighter,” said Merton.

“This takes a great deal of persuasion,” I continued. “Networks are notoriously undaring, especially about properties developed by penniless talent agents. However, I have entree to the right people. You might call them ‘friends’ in fact.”

“Friends are good things to have,” said Merton.

“Very useful,” said Myron.

I reached into my breast pocket. The same place where I carried my Nielsen and my Trendex and the savings-bank book which reveals I own \$206.87.

“I have here a letter. Please do not grab. I will read it.”

I opened the letter. I cleared my throat.

“This letter is dated today.”

“It is timely,” said Myron.

“It may be,” said Merton.

“It is on the embossed stationery of the MBC network. It

begins: 'Dear Mr. Norden.' The first version started out 'Dear Rog,' but I suggested the change. It continues: 'Our program people have carefully weighed the values inherent in the show which your agency has taken an option on in behalf of the House of Karess,' Paragraph.

"We agree with you that the basic concept of this idea has real merit. If properly produced, we think it may well be one of the successful vehicles of the upcoming season. Therefore, we are prepared to offer you either of the following time periods on a thirteen-week firm basis: Tuesday evening at 8:30 P.M. Eastern Standard Time, Friday evening at 9 P.M. Eastern Standard Time. This offer is subject to our normal contractual provisions such as minimum line-up, discounts, etc. Very truly yours.'"

"Who signed it?" asked Merton.

"Lansing Thompson, vice-president in charge of programs, MBC, the only person whose signature counts," I replied coldly.

"Lovely," said Merton.

"Beautiful," said Myron.

"The next step?" asked Merton.

"A Thermofax of this document will be sent by boy at once to Mr. Max Thau, Vice President in Charge of Programs at UBC, along with the request that he come to the office of Mr. Merton Karamaz tomorrow at ten A.M. with whatever lawyers, program people, and other assorted clowns he deems necessary."

"This will be a pleasure," said Merton.

"A ball," said Myron.

"Now just a minute. Let's not take too much for granted. I want you, Merton, to handle the meeting. But I want you to stick to the script I outline. It'll take strict adherence to it or we're dead."

"I will stick," said Merton Karamaz contritely.

"I'll coach you later. Now for the other two items on the docket. First, I want you to attempt to act gracious to our new account executive."

"Oh, God," said Merton holding his head in both hands.

"He has us," said Myron.

"I do," I said. "So I will bring him in. The last man failed mainly because you two didn't give him a chance. Therefore, your people crucified him. I hope this man will not suffer the same fate."

"I can tell what he's like already," said Merton despondently.

"I can see him now," added Myron.

I buzzed my girl. "Ask Les Jolliffe to come in, please. The second item," I said turning to the Partners, "is the use of Mary Cranston as House of Karess spokeswoman on the show."

You could see the caps on their wisdom teeth as Les Jolliffe walked in.

Les Jolliffe was one of the account-men types I described before as A Legacy. He was with us for life—as his father had been before him. He sounded like a good type for the Karess account at the time.

In the first place, he looked too old—which I thought would be good. He was bald—which I thought appropriate. He wore steel-rimmed glasses—which I thought impressive. He was arch conservative in dress.

As I learned later, everyone was either too old or too young for the Partners—the ideal age being a short period which few mortals ever passed through. Sort of like the town of *Brigadoon*—an in-between period that was delightful but occurred only between centuries.

In addition, Les Jolliffe was meticulous. This the Partners considered slow-witted. He was organized. This they con-

sidered unimaginative. He was careful. This they considered stupid. And he was Southern. He "you-alled" and "I declared" you to death. And to the Partners this was a speech defect. Probably caused by a mental block.

The man didn't have a chance.

No sooner did he open his mouth to say, "I'm pleased to meet you all," when their heads began to shake.

"This man has a wealth of background in the business," I said, "especially in the field of fashion."

They shook their heads more violently.

"Rather than embarrass him, I'll say nothing other than that we consider him to be a well-rounded ad man."

I guess I couldn't have picked a worse adjective.

"What does he know about color plates?" asked Merton.

"Yeah—I'll bet he's never been in an engraving plant."

Before an answer could be fashioned, Merton continued, "I can tell he doesn't know type faces."

"He's type-blind, I'll bet," said Myron.

"Now just a minute," I said. "If you gentlemen are going to ask the questions and supply the answers, too, we'll both leave the room."

"Don't bother," said Merton.

"He talks too slow," said Myron.

"If we can dispense with the cross-examination, I'll see that Mr. Jolliffe meets the proper people of your organization tomorrow. In the meanwhile, I want to talk to you about Mary Cranston."

"Mary Cranston!" said Myron. His eyes narrowed. His voice went up two octaves. He half rose out of his chair.

"Mary Cranston," I repeated. Myron fixed a pair of very narrowed eyes on me while Les Jolliffe stumbled out in silence.

"It is, of course, to your advantage," I said, "to have some-

one talking for your company on television that is really a part of the company."

"It is?" said Myron.

"Quiet," said Merton.

"In place of the obvious—an announcer paid to do the job, paid to enthuse, an announcer who sells fashion tonight and underarm deodorants tomorrow and life insurance the next day—a real person from the concern—exclusive to the concern. This is a headstart."

"There is something in what you say," said Merton Karamaz.

"Not much," said Myron Essenger.

"Even if we were to buy exclusivity—say from a Hollywood star—the stink of phoniness would surround our copy. This approach is trite. The public, however uninformed, suspects it."

"A lot of people do that," said Myron.

"A lot of people are idiots," said Merton. "Proceed."

"Now we must ask ourselves, is this girl capable? Is she too attractive? Or too homely? Is she too much an amateur? Or too much a pro? Here you must rely on me."

"We are doing this a lot already," said Myron.

"He ties his own noose," said Merton. "That's why we hired him."

"Therefore, you must let me decide on the details of the hanging," I said. "I propose to call her Miss Lana Lynn. Restyle her hair. In my opinion, this girl will then have everything."

"How did you come by this opinion?" leered Myron.

"By being observant," I said looking him right in the middle of his slanted brow. "By knowing my business. Shall I go into detail?"

"Please do," said Merton.

Myron merely glowered.

"First her looks. Just right. Attractive. Smart. But not too smart. She looks like the girl next door. Or everybody's sister. She's all scrubbed and glowing. Not painted and slinky—or as you once put it, not slut appeal. What a wonderful go-between for us! And as for her voice. It's perfect. Midwest. Low, compelling, sincere. As for her knowledge of your line—also perfect. Her love for it—the best. It takes only coaching to get the most out of her."

"Aha!" shrieked Myron.

"And why aha?" asked Merton acidly.

"Coaching," he said.

"Coaching, I repeat," I said. "Which I will do. And as a result, I feel we'll come up with a girl who can sell products like Betty Furness."

"Sounds good," said Merton.

"Sounds stupid," said Myron.

"There's one thing to be settled."

"Yes?" asked Merton.

"I don't know if she'll do it."

"You mean you haven't sold her a bill of goods on this?" asked Myron.

"I haven't even mentioned it," I replied. "I wanted your blessing," I said looking at Myron Essenger first—then Merton Karamaz.

"Okay," said Merton.

"Okay, I guess," said Myron.

"And I must now negotiate a contract for the lady with you," I added.

"A contract?"

"Yes, and I suggest two-fifty a week for the first thirteen—"

"What," shouted Merton. "The girl makes a hundred and twenty-five a week now. She ought to pay us for the opportunity. Hollywood may see her."

"God forbid," said Myron.

"I agree," I said to Myron. "We want here here—so I suggest an escalator clause of another two-fifty for the second thirteen weeks. In other words, if she's worth renewing, she's worth five hundred a week."

"How the man throws away money," said Merton sadly.

"Our money!" added his Partner.

"Agreed?" I asked.

"What alternative do we have," said Merton.

"None," I replied. "At least none worth considering."

"Is the meeting over?" asked Merton.

"You are both dismissed—with thanks," I said. "Thanks for being so cooperative."

"Yeah," said Myron. "Aren't we?"

"Good-by," I said ushering them to the door.



## *ten*

The five men were seated around the table. I let the conversation die and gave the hush that settled over the group a minute to dig in. Then, by prearrangement, I pushed a buzzer on the desk.

The door opened and the Partners marched in.

The men at the table rose in unison as if Mary, Queen of Scots had appeared.

"Gentlemen," I said, "let me present Mr. Merton Karamaz and Mr. Myron Essenger."

Merton nodded ever so slightly.

Myron nodded a bit more visibly.

Merton took his seat at the head of the table. Myron sat at the other end.

"Reading from left to right," I said to the Partners, "William Guyon, vice president in charge of network sales; Max Thau, vice president in charge of network programs; Tory Timmons, vice president in charge of station relations; Grant Baumgarten, president of the network; Alan Shortell, assistant to the president."

Each man sat down as I said his name.

The drama was about to begin. The curtain was rising. The cast was nervous with anticipation. I threw the cue.

"Let us get right to the point," said Merton Karamaz, directing his words, as per instructions, to Grant Baumgarten.

"The House of Karess has optioned what will be the most startling television show of this or any season. We are prepared to put this show on in a suitable time spot, on a suitable network—within four weeks."

Grant Baumgarten tried to avoid the glance that was directed his way. His deeply ringed eyes and lined face, heavy jowls, and ruddy complexion showed clearly that here was a man who already had had two heart attacks and could stand just one more.

At times like this Grant wished he had taken his doctor's advice and had turned the reins over to others. Or that he had not allowed the management firm which had placed him with the network five years before to do so. But it was too late for that now. There was a tinge of sadness in Grant Baumgarten's eyes as he listened to Merton Karamaz.

"I realize that my opinion and those of my associates on this program are merely our opinions. You are entitled to yours."

At this point Merton turned and looked squarely at Max Thau, custodian of programs on the network. An ex-film producer caught up in the celluloid travail of Hollywood, when a change in management suddenly left him jobless after twenty years of producing good, bad, and indifferent features. A man who wanted to make a series out of Camille, but didn't dare do anything but keep his Hollywood friends busy producing westerns. Max was fat and mustached and he wore a plaid vest. His hair was cropped short and was jet black, probably dyed.

"Since we are in a business of opinion and are here on a matter of opinion, I have arranged to screen for you the new television program of the House of Karess."

I rose to get at the projector behind me.

Merton stopped me. He had mastered his part perfectly. His timing was superb.

"Just a minute, Mr. Norden," he said.

I halted.

"As you view this kinescope," he went on, "try to visualize what you are seeing with a new and completely different MC. A man with whom the viewer can identify himself. Next think of more close-ups. This way we will be getting more out of the contestants' reactions, more tension, more empathy for those at home. Visualize, too, a more concise way of staging the basic game. Fewer three shots. More twos. In addition, the language of the game is overlong—unnecessarily so. These, however, are minor concerns. The appeal of this program is quite obvious as it now appears. All right, Mr. Norden."

I went over and doused the house lights and started the projector.

Thirty minutes later the film had rolled through the projector and onto the pickup reel. I flipped on the lights.

This is always a crucial moment in the presentation of any property—whether it's a kinnie of a live show you're screening for the network, as in this case, or the showing of a pilot to a bunch of rug-weavers who you hope will sponsor it.

The pause after the last printed foot has run past the little gate until someone opens his yap often determines the fate of the whole thing.

All the satellites turn toward Mr. Big who's in orbit center and they try to figure out what the hell he's going to say. So they'll be spinning in the right direction.

And Mr. Big who's spent the last three decades of his life making soap or toothpaste or pouring aluminum is probably just as confused. Especially without his wife there to tell him what the score is.

That's why I try to be the guy in first. Just a jump ahead

of Mr. Big with the ole reaction. A smile on my face, a few confident words, a smidgeon of conviction topped off with a helping of enthusiasm.

The gentlemen at the network weren't much different. So I was taking no chances. I knew too much about their politics. Their lack of judgment. The fears that rocked 'em.

I jumped in hard. "This show," I said, "is a blockbuster. When we put our new MC in it, make the few minor adjustments that Mr. Karamaz has so ably suggested, it's on the way to the races."

Max looked from me to the boss. The boss looked from me to Max. The others looked at each other. Somebody else had to talk. Since the network president got paid the most, it was his honor.

"You may have something there," he said carefully. "By George, you just may. Of course, you have to be able to sustain it. Week after week, that is."

Such statesmanship! Saying you have to sustain a show in television is like saying you're going to need cameras to get it on the air. Positive brilliance!

Now the clowns had their cue.

"You hit the nail on the head, G.B.," said Max. "It's got to be sustained."

"I think that's quite pertinent," said Alan Shortell, G.B.'s assistant. He was the one that had been to Harvard Business School. He had a future. He knew where it lay.

And so on down the line.

I let them get in their licks.

"You gentlemen are quite right," I said. "What good is a one-shot in half-hour form? Continuity, sustaining power, that's essential to this vehicle."

They all nodded at once. Like Kukla and Ollie to Fran.

"To assure us of week-after-week draw," I continued, "we've got the slickest device in the world. Our contestants

come back to *take* their dough—or to *put* it on the line for a chance at more. Isn't that lovely?" I said with a toothy smile.

"Ah, clever," said G.B.

"Perfect," said the satellites and they started rotating again.

"Our next question here at the House of Karess is which network will be the one to televise this blockbuster," I said. "It was only fair to you gentlemen from UBC that we inform you your competition is very bullish on this property. Therefore, I sent you their interest—in writing."

The UBC men looked at each other.

I stared at my nails. Where they should have been, that is. The silence was deafening.

Bill Guyon now rose to the occasion. "We've got several prime time slots we can offer you." Bill was a bitter man of fifty who looked sixty. He was tough. Fairly honest. Too often under the influence of six martinis. He had come up through radio spot sales. He had managed two local stations along the way. He had been in the business a long, long time, and he looked like he had hated every minute of it.

"By moving the George Weldon show to an earlier spot, which the sponsor has been after us to do for some time, we'd open up that nice Friday half hour at ten. Your show's appeal is primarily adult. So a late spot with a good feed-in such as Weldon now gets from our new comedy series would be ideal."

I figured to make him think I was going along with him. I took out my Nielsen Rating pocketpiece and turned to the Friday line-ups. I pretended to study it carefully. I pursed my lips. I moved my finger across the page and studied the competition. Then I nodded sagely.

"Yes, Bill. I think you've got a nice spot there. Good feed-in, as you say. Up in the thirties—even in average

audience. Competition is fairly weak on both the other networks. It's a very nice spot."

Bill brightened. That was mainly because he had seen Baumgarten brighten. It was now time to take the joy out of Mudville. I looked over at Merton Karamaz who had been watching me like a fish hawk. He got the cue.

"However," said Merton, "it is not half as good a spot as —" he paused deliberately. All eyes were fixed on him now.

"—not *anywhere near* as good a spot as Wednesday at nine."

I think I heard four gasps. One per network man.

"That's the spot you're in now," said Guyon.

"That's where you yourselves have 'Melodrama Playhouse,'" said Max Thau.

"And, Mr. Karamaz, you'll recall that you signed a firm fifty-two-week contract for both show and time," said President Baumgarten, baring his teeth a bit.

"We thought you were contemplating a second TV show," said the young man from Harvard.

Merton Karamaz moved over to within a foot of young Harvard. He put his jaw about three inches away from the boy. He spoke to him alone and in a very low voice.

"We are," he said, "—if we go to the other network."

Harvard recoiled.

Baumgarten took over.

"In other words, if we're to get this new show, it must go into your present time spot."

"Precisely," said Merton Karamaz.

"One hundred per cent," said Myron from the other end of the room.

I shut up.

"And what exactly do you expect us to do with your contract for the present show?"

"I expect you to tear it up," Merton spat at him.

"You must realize we've firm commitments with cast, directors, producers. We've a contract for space at the Dominion lot in Hollywood, we've probably got a dozen scripts paid for—this represents hundreds of thousands of dollars. What do you expect us to do about our commitments?"

"Get out of them," said Merton flatly.

Baumgarten was aghast.

It was now my turn.

"I don't think it's as serious a picture as you paint, Grant," I said. "If you don't mind my being presumptuous and telling you how to handle your own business, I'd suggest going right ahead with 'Melodrama Playhouse.' Put it into syndication. I understand your syndication department is short on product anyway—and you've got that big staff of salesmen chasing all over the country."

Baumgarten looked at Tory Timmons.

"We need products for syndication, but we're not that desperate," Tory said glumly. This was a crack at Max Thau, who'd made the network's deal for the Melodrama Series. "Also, you'd have an incomplete cycle. You'll have run about ten on the network so there's only twenty-nine left for syndication."

"We'd gladly release the ones we've used at once to you," I said.

Timmons was always dour. Timmons was always outspoken. He was now double-dour and very outspoken. "Thanks for nothing," he said.

"I say we'd have a helluva time selling that show even in Butte, Montana," he went on. "If we load our men up with crap like that, we do ourselves more harm than good. Furthermore, when the news hits the trades that we let these birds out of a firm deal because the show's so terrible, it will hardly be welcomed when our salesmen take it around."

Max Thau had to defend himself.

"For Christ's sake, Tory," he protested. "The show's not that bad. You can retitle it—get some kind of a name personality as a host."

"I'd like to see you pounding the sidewalks of Tulsa with a can of that goddam film under your arm," said Timmons.

I thought I ought to help. "There's quite a history of shows that didn't do well on the networks going fine in market-by-market syndication," I said. Then I named a few turkeys that were supposed to be making big dough in reruns.

"Yeah," said Tory. "I know all about that. I read. But I've seen our own company's book on what's reported in the trade press as a money-maker. Also, there are so many feature-film packages available to the local station, half-hour stinkers like this no longer win by default."

Grant Baumgarten stood up.

"Gentlemen, we can't decide this here. If I have your final offer—"

"You do," said Merton.

"Then my colleagues and I must go back and weigh the matter."

"We must make our minds up on the other network's proposal within forty-eight hours," I said.

"You will hear from us tomorrow morning. Good day."

They filed out.

"They're licked and they know it," said Merton gleefully.

"It was wonderful," beamed Myron, dancing up and down.

"It was effective, but not half as much fun as you two make it out to be," I said.

I felt kind of sore. Mostly at myself. What I did, I had to do. Also, I knew what the network's answer would be tomorrow. They'd knuckle under. They had to.

And the next day they did.

I know it's not because I live right. I don't know what it is



—just dumb luck, I guess. But somehow I've the Weather Man on my side.

I wouldn't have had enough sense to order this weather though I couldn't have done better if I had.

When I called Mary up, it had started to drizzle. Not pour. Just drizzle and, with it, it got warm outside—almost fifty. So while there wasn't a trace of spring you could point to in the city, you got a faint hint of it—just a whiff.

Actually in a town like New York spring sneaks up on you. You don't have the green things poking up and the birds coming and the other obvious business that brings spring to the suburbs.

All you ever get, at the start, is this smell and even that isn't much of a sign. It takes a real New Yorker to tell because it is so faint. But I can tell it blindfolded, loaded, or locked in an office with the windows down. It makes you uneasy inside, sort of sad and happy, too, all at the same time. It's a gnawing feeling, yet pleasant. Maybe I sound crazy.

Anyway, I got this whiff of spring when I stood outside my building trying to spot a cab with its topside light on. All of them were occupied, thanks to the drizzle. Then finally one came, and I got in and rattled off Mary's address.

I had told her, on the phone, I wanted to see her. For business reasons, I said. But, I added, I was gentleman enough to buy her a drink also. She thought I was kidding, but she said she'd put aside some sketches she was working on and give me an hour. No more, no less.

I held the cab and clomped up the three flights to the eyrie of the Three Roommates. "Get on your raincoat," I said to her when she opened the door. "There's a cab devouring nickles owned by Roux & Day, and I'm not supposed to be squandering company money."

We went down the stairs together. She had a blue raincoat on with a darker blue collar and a leather strap at the

throat. The hat was one of those junior-sized sou-westers you used to see in sea movies. Only this one was blue to match the coat and her eyes and to allow a tiny shred of that non-descript color hair to peek out at the forehead. I wouldn't say the girl looked cute because I hate the word. But if a sensible definition ever comes along that'll do justice to her appearance, I'll buy it.

Before opening the door to the street, I pushed her against the wall, placing my hands on her shoulders. It was a long, hard kiss and when I took my lips away I moved them to the tip of her nose and then across each of her eyes.

"This is business?" she said.

"Nothing but," I replied. "I'm reducing your resistance. Now you see why I like my work."

I opened the door and we went out into the waiting cab.

"Honey, I've got an idea," I said. "To hell with a drink." She looked at me.

"Driver," I said to the cabbie. "Take us to Fifty-ninth just west of Fifth."

"What a strange business address," said Mary.

"You'll see," I said.

When we pulled up opposite the Plaza I got out and she followed. There were five carriages waiting with five sad-looking horses attached to them, each wearing a shiny rain-coat.

"Let's take this one." I picked out one in the middle because it had a closed-in compartment which is, of course, better protected from the elements among other things.

"You *are* crazy," she said.

"We are crazy," I said.

If you could smell the urge of spring to make herself known in the rest of the city, here you could almost taste it. It rested heavily on the rain-filled air that rolled in from

Central Park in short, sharp gusts that blew across the dark, shining trees and low shrubs and the wet rocks.

Far ahead and to our right the lights of Central Park West blinked and flickered high up and made pinpoint holes in the spattered blackness of the night. To our left the old Plaza looked sadly across at the modernity of the stores on the Avenue and probably remembered when buses were double-decked and these very same carriages were new and the drivers and their horses were young and a living part of the city.

The character from atop climbed down and opened the door for us and we got in. Then he tucked a heavy dank blanket around us and got back up on his perch. The horse started moving, making the clopping sound I'd heard on radio sound-effects records for so many years—but here the sound of his shoes had the highs of Central Park ringing from them and the lilt of reality and it quickened your breath and, if you weren't careful, it might have misted your eyes.

We moved across the Avenue and back in again to the Park to take the long, slow, lovely journey that circles this oasis of trapped nature in this strange city of trapped people, and neither of us spoke for a long, long while.

"Mary, I've been talking to the Partners about you," I said to break the ice.

"Now, honestly, Rog," she said. "Are you fooling?"

"No, I couldn't be more serious. I was discussing something that I think would be great for you—as well as for them."

"And what, for goodness sake, could that be?" she said.

"I think with a little practice—that is, with my help—you could be a tremendous success delivering the commercials on the new TV show."

Mary gasped. "Now I know you're fooling. Or crazy. I wasn't even good at reciting in high school in Fort Madison."

"Maybe not. But you'd be good, maybe even sensational, doing televised versions of what I saw you do several times in the office."

"You're ribbing me."

"It'd be a pretty silly joke," I said.

"Yes—but—well, I don't know that I'd want to, even if I could."

"You should give it a try. I've got Merton and Myron to agree to two-fifty a week firm over the first thirteen—and double that if they renew you for another cycle."

"M'gawd!" said Mary.

"I think you'd like it—apart from the money," I went on.

"I might," she said. "But it's so hard to see myself doing it—in front of all those people—I'd be scared silly."

"At first. But you'd get used to it. You'd get so you'd enjoy it. Know how I know that?"

She shook her head. The brown hair bobbed up and down.

"I watched you a couple of times now giving those talks in your office. The way you warm up to an audience, the way you perform for them and revel in it—hell, honey, this is acting. You've got it in you."

"Oh Rog, that's different. Just a few people at a time—and something I know a lot about. Gosh, that's—"

"Now just a minute. The subject matter won't change. We'll write the copy for you in your style—and you'll edit it to make sure it comes natural to you. What'd you say?"

She hesitated. "I must admit I'd like to try. I also will admit I'm petrified at the idea—but, darn it, I'll take a chance."

I took her hand. "I'm gonna work with you every day for an hour or so. First I'll get some typical commercials to work from. That'll take a day or two. Then I'll rent a Teleprompt-

ter and put it in my office. I want you to get used to reading without looking like you're reading."

"Who talks to the Boss about my decision?" Mary said.

"You do. Only make sure you go to Merton. I think Myron thinks I'm up to something more than television."

"Why the nose old lech," said Mary.

"I am—of course. I'll see you more now."

"I'm glad of that," she said simply.

"One other thing, you're going to have a new name for the program."

"What's wrong with Cranston?"

"Nothing. But it sounds too much like a girl from Fort Madison."

"It is, suh! And that should be good enough for anybody."

"Not for the House of Karess's new television show. I hereby dub you Lana Lynn!"

"Dear God!" said Mary. "You're not kidding?"

"Nope. I think you need the handle. I know the show does. You needn't adopt it legally or anything. However, if this show takes hold and you with it, you'll be Lana Lynn to every sonofagun in the country. Not Mary Cranston."

"What *am* I letting myself in for?" she said.

"Fun, success, a new career," I said. "I hope so, at least."

She put her face next to mine. The horses' hoofs were ringing out clearly. Outside the rain had stopped and a big-bellied old moon was poking through the clouds.

The lights in the park gleamed on the wet pavement. As the clouds scudded across the moon's face, dark shapes of trees and rocks that lined the roadway seemed to move about and reassemble themselves.

"If you say so, Rog, I'll try."

I put my arm around her and felt the firmness of her body next to mine. We rode that way through the rest of the circle about Central Park, back to where we had started.

## *eleven*

The most nervous breed of animal in the world comes under the general heading of Talent. They're always twitching and strutting and yokking it up in general. Diarrhea of the larynx is an occupational hazard—talk, talk, talk. Because if you're quiet or if you're introspective, it'll be interpreted in the trade that you're on the way down. Don't ask me why.

Anywhere there's a crowd of people and you let an actor or two loose, you'll be able to spot him or her or them from the next building. Be the center of attraction or you're gonna lose your option, brother. Bubble over or it means the fire has gone out.

I don't care what kind of talent we're talking about—good or stinko, acrobat or soprano, sleight-of-hand performers or Shakespeareans—they're always performing. Always on stage. Always on camera.

It took me a long while to feel at home when I was with someone who was a performer. I used to call 'em all nuts and say I liked to avoid them. Yet I was always drawn to them, maybe because of the magic that the theater holds for me, maybe because there was always a big jutting piece of

envy in my attitude. I always feel inadequate when I see someone hold an audience tightly in his palm and toy with it and draw the tears and then wipe them away with the big belly laugh. When I come out of a show that's knocked me right out of my seat, I come out sore, not happy; morbid, not entranced. It's this feeling of inadequacy I guess, the fact that I didn't write it or play the lead or at least direct the thing.

But as the years went by and dealing with talent became an hourly job, I got to understand these folks and how damn scared they all really are—no matter how many years they'd been at it, no matter how many Oscars or Emmies or what-have-you's they've won. By God, they are just plumb scared not only opening night but the next night and night after night. And especially "between shows," as we say. Especially when all they could do to keep busy was to wonder where the hell the next job was coming from. If it was coming, that is.

All of which leads me up to one Bunny Lewis, ex-hooper and funny man, floor-show MC from New Orleans to Vegas and back, sometime actor whose services had just been dispensed with after five performances in a legitimate-type turkey up in New Haven, sparing it the pain of being mangled by the *Times* and *Trib* in New York City.

Bunny Lewis was the guy I had figured on for our MC. A phenomenon of show biz. A typical one-sentence in *Variety*. A great man for yokking it up at a party. And maybe a new idea in television MC's. Here's the way I figured it. He was good looking, young—about thirty—not overexposed (nobody knew him!), and there was something about the guy that reminded me of Mr. Everybody. He was a nice lovable shnook. No brain. But not really a jerk. I'd seen him off Broadway, on Broadway, in assorted punk night-club routines, and years ago over in Union City carrying

the witticisms among the G-strings. Maybe this guy had it.

I thought all the foregoing fast because Bunny Lewis was standing in front of me in my office. He tipped his hat back on his head to show he didn't give a hoot, while down inside his twisted guts I knew he was wondering and hoping and dying.

"Hi, chum, what's the gimmick?" he said. "I was on my way to Chi. There's a producer there wants to talk to me about a feature. But I figured I'd drop in anyhow. Just for old time's sake. Anyway you spent the dime for the call. I hate to see you pee away such an investment."

"Sit down, Bunny," I said quietly. "Cigarette?"

"I'm not old enough," he replied, draping himself over one of my leather chairs.

"I'm sorry about the thing up in New Haven," I said.

An ordinary human being would have said, thanks, me too. Not so Bunny. He said, "Naw. I'm glad. If this turkey'd have come in the Big City, it'd have stunk up Broadway so bad it'd have hurt me. My performance was terrific, you see. Especially for a badly written part. But still these turkeys rub off on you, no matter."

"I see," I said. "Look, let's get down to business. I've got a show under option for a new client of ours—"

"Yeah, I read the trades. It's called 'The Put 'N Take Quiz.' It's owned by that professional mick, Kevin Antrim. You give away everything but girls. And you're looking for an MC."

"It's always good to get your appraisal of things," I said to the charming character in my chair. "Well, I can see you're not interested. The features are calling. I won't keep you any longer." I stood up and walked toward the door.

"Wait a minute," whined Bunny, jumping to his feet. "What's your hurry? Who said anything about not being interested?"



"You didn't have to say it. Your tone implied it," I answered.

"You shouldn't be reading things into what I say. Why shouldn't I be interested?" There was a pleading note in his voice now. "Maybe there's something for me in it. Maybe I can help you."

"Maybe you can help yourself," I said rather coldly, and then I was sorry I had. I sat down again. So did Bunny. He was leaning forward now and his whole body was tense. The cockiness had drained out of him like sludge out of a radiator.

"Let's get a few things straight," I said. "I'm not trying to do you a favor. I'm only trying to do what I think will build a great show. For some strange reason, I can see you in it. If you're interested, just nod. Then let me do the talking. If you're not, we'll call this thing quits. No hard feelings."

"Interested? You know damn well I'm interested."

"Okay. There's an MC in this show already who, in my opinion, is wrong. Very wrong. In my opinion, you're right. At least you *can* be right. It's a matter of how you play the part. No, I'll take that back."

Bunny looked at me quizically. I went on. "If you play the part—if you play any part—you'll be just as wrong as this square we now have. Probably worse. But if you play it honestly, that is, as yourself, I think it will work, and work wonders."

"I don't get you."

"What I mean is this. You have got to be yourself. I'll explain to you in a minute who you are and then I'll work with you for the next two weeks every single day so that you can get into this role. Don't kid yourself. Playing yourself is the toughest thing you've ever done. Or anyone else has for that matter. If it's phoney or any part of it isn't right, it's going to lie there and turn green in the sun."

"You know I'll do anything you say, Rog," said Bunny. The poor bastard meant it.

"We'll start you at seven hundred and fifty a week, which is way over what you're worth right now."

"Jesus," said Bunny.

"But the reason I'm going to start you high is that I want two-week escape clauses."

"But for Christ's sake," said Bunny.

"Let's not get secular," I said. "Look, I'm paying for the escapes because I may be wrong and I may need them. I don't think so. I hope I won't. But if you get by these first few weeks, we jump you to a thousand for twenty-six firm. Now that's fair, isn't it?"

Bunny Lewis looked at me and nodded.

"I'll draw up the papers. Anyone representing you?"

"Not for TV," he said. "But I'll get someone."

"Call me and tell me who he is and I'll send them to him tomorrow as soon as they are signed—in fact, within twenty-four hours after that, I want to get together with you. That will be the first of our little seances. It may not be easy to make you act like yourself, but we're going to do it. Agreed?"

"Yeah and thanks," said Bunny.

He got up and walked out.

## *twelve*

At 10:15 A.M. the next day my secretary came into my office and plunked down a registered letter. I always open registered mail, mail written in a dainty feminine hand, and mail that looks like it might contain money, right away. I opened this.

My insides began to churn.

The gist of this love note, composed by some goddam lawyer representing one Llewellyn Thomas, was that a show based on the parlor game "Put 'n Take" had been submitted to the UBC network six years previously and summarily turned down by the then head of programing at UBC, who hadn't been in the job in the last five years—in fact, he wasn't even in this world, having died four years ago.

There was a photostat of the letter on UBC stationery signed by the now deceased man attesting to the fact that he thought the idea was lousy and the network would never even entertain the idea of stinking up its fine program structure with a turkey of this nature. Of course the language was more guarded than that. But that's what the guy meant.

The letter from Llewellyn Thomas's lawyer went on to say an injunction would be obtained to prevent our putting this show on anywhere—especially on good old UBC.

While my viscera revolved, my mind was also active. Can the s.o.b. get an injunction? If so, we're in real trouble. It takes months to settle these damn things. That alone could kill the show, the time slot, and your friend, Roger Norden.

Also, without an injunction, what sort of a claim could anyone have on a parlor game? As such it's in the public domain. Of course, our particular format, the language of the show, all this, if provably different from Mr. Thomas's brainchild would put us in the clear. And I was sure Kevin never heard of Llewellyn Thomas. Still, there was that fool letter from an executive of the network. That was damaging. It meant a possible infringement of rights and could make the UBC boys afraid of touching the show.

My girl came in again.

"Mr. Merton Karamaz is on the phone. It's urgent. He seems quite excited."

"He has cause to be," I said. I picked up the phone. I talked first.

"Calm down," I said. "Before you get your hemoglobin all curdled, get your company legal eagles together. I'll call Kevin and we'll be right over. This thing can be taken care of." I added "I hope" under my breath.

The man sputtered and fumed and hung up.

I was about to call Kevin when my girl said he was on the phone. He, too, had gotten the letter. Mr. Thomas's lawyer was on the ball. That meant the network also was in on a copy including a stat of their own remarks to Mr. Thomas.

"Did you read what that effing s.o.b. said?" shouted Kevin. He was being so Irish it was difficult to understand him. Not that I cared to understand him just now.

"Look," I said. "Shut up and answer one question. Did you ever meet this bastard Thomas?"

"Of course not."

"Okay," I replied. "Get your shillelagh and hurry over to Merton Karamaz's office. Pronto. I'll be there afore you."

When I arrived at Merton's office he was still sputtering. He had help from his intrepid Partner and three sad-faced legal eagles, Messrs. Kaufmann, Sr., Kaufmann, Jr., and O'Connor. These three monkeys kept jabbering among themselves in monotones. Every so often one of them would rush up to Merton and whisper. Then he'd look sadly in my direction. Obviously, it was my fault that this s.o.b. from out of the blue had written the letter. Obviously, it was my fault that this s.o.b. had been rejected by the dead man from the network. Obviously, it was my job to settle the goddam thing or be settled myself. This was Crisis Number One in our charming but young relationship.

I was perspiring.

Kevin walked in uttering four-letter words with reckless and irrelevant abandon. He made very little sense. The legal eagles eyed him sadly too and took up where they had left off with their furtive conversation. It was a nice scene. Real Grade B material.

"You realize," fumed Merton, "that the network has one of these?" He threw his letter at my feet. I let it lie there. He was about to kick me around. It was a well-known pattern. The only thing to do was kick back.

"Look," I said to him, "I realize a helluva lot more than you."

"Well, what do you propose to do? That's what we hired you for."

"Yeah, what's the answer?" said Myron.

The legal eagles whispered up a storm, and one of them rushed up to Myron and gave him some sweet talk in the right ear.

"I propose to settle with this maniac," I said quietly. "Not

that we couldn't win this case in any court in the land. But it would take months. Until then, an injunction might be possible. We can't be kept off the air."

"We can't be kept off UBC," corrected Merton. "They're the ones that are taking us out of our present show, you'll recall. You'll also recall that was your first assignment," he said at me.

"That's why we'll have to settle. As fast as we can. As cheap as we can."

Two Kaufmanns whispered to Merton this time, one at each ear.

"Let's discuss the word 'we' you just used," snarled Merton. Here it came. I had smelled it a mile away.

"Whatever money this costs comes out of the advertising agency's fifteen per cent," he said. "It's part of your cost of doing business." Now was the time for all good men to come to the aid of the party. Fold now and you fold forever.

I got up. I went over to my hat. I put it on. Then I put on my coat.

"Where the hell are you going?" shouted Merton Karamaz.

"I am going back to my office," I said. "And when I get there I will call my secretary in and dictate a letter which states that the House of Karess and Roux & Day have severed relations. A short but happy romance. I will then have said letter delivered by hand to you, Mr. Karamaz. According to our letter of employment."

"Wait," he screamed and rushed over and grabbed me by the coat lapels.

"For what?" I said.

"You know we need your help," he said. He hated to admit it. He hated me for making him admit it. Especially in front of the legal eagles. And his adorable Partner. And Kevin Antrim.

"Our agency works for 15 per cent on time and talent. Any

time you want to change this," I said looking him in the eye, "you must first change agencies. You are perfectly free to take this show anywhere."

Kaufmann Senior made the mistake of speaking out loud. "You mean your agency has no hold on this program?"

I marched over to the brace of legal talent.

"I mean precisely that and the reason for it, gentlemen and lawyers, is that it's unethical in our business to take a piece of a property. That doesn't mean it isn't being done. But not by Roux & Day, Inc."

More whispering between Merton and the older Kaufmann.

"Goddamit, no!" yelled Merton at him. In answer to what, I couldn't say.

The elder Kaufmann recoiled to the wall and blended in with the draperies as best he could.

So far Kevin Antrim had not said a word during the entire fracas. His turn was coming.

"Kevin, though this is no fault of yours, I'm afraid it's your problem," I said.

Kevin uttered a few words. All unprintable.

"If the prosperous House of Karess or a big Madison Avenue advertising agency were to approach the humble Llewellyn Thomas, the price might be determined by our corporate bank accounts."

"So I'm to face the bastard?" said Kevin.

"You are. And if you play your cards right, I think you can get away with five hundred a week for the run of the show. Start at a hundred and work up. It will be split fifty-fifty between you and the House of Karess."

"Mither of God," said Kevin.

Merton was grim but silent.

"Furthermore, we've no time to lose. The network must be trying to get me now. I left word with my girl *not* to tell

them where I am. Kevin, you have our friend Mr. Thomas's lawyer's address. Hightail it over there now."

I closed the door to Merton's office behind me.

All in all it was a delightful meeting. Now I had to wait. Wait to see if I was right about Mr. Thomas. Or did he and his lawyer have real delusions of grandeur? We'd soon see.

Two hours later Kevin called me.

"You were pretty much right, you s.o.b.," he said. "He started at a Gee a week. I started at one bill. We ended up at six hundred. I guess I'll have to swallow the effing difference."

"I'm afraid so," I told him.

"Well, call up your little effing playmates and tell them I have the paper."

"I will," I said. "Good going, Kevin. And I'm sorry."

"I'll bet you are," he said.

"You've still got a nice piece of change coming your way on this show," I said.

"Not half of what I expected."

"It never is," I said.

He hung up.

I now had to call the network *before* talking to the Partners. I'd been ducking their calls all morning. I now had the answer. The only one possible. When I relayed it to the network, I intended to rub their noses in that stupid letter their deceased veepee had written. Just to keep them off balance.

"Merton," I said when his girl put him on.

"What happened?" he asked. His voice was cold. But eager.

"Everything is settled."

"You are very lucky," he said.



"You are, too," I said with three lumps of saccharine in my tone.

He didn't reply.

"The network knows and so everything is okay there," I added.

"What did Antrim have to pay?" he asked.

"Six hundred per show. You're only in for two-fifty though."

"Only," he snarled. "I suppose you are picking up the difference?"

"You suppose wrongly," I said.

"Then who is?"

"Antrim," I replied. "I'm sorry, I have work to do now. Good-by." I hung up.

I had rented the smallest studio the network had and arranged with the Teleprompter people to have an operator and two of their machines on hand. On the set the machines would be on cameras just under the lenses. But here they were on tripods. Mary showed up on the dot of 2 P.M., and I ordered up a pot of coffee for the three of us.

"This is Lesson Number One," I said to her.

She looked eager. Also damned beautiful.

"It's going to be a long one. Tiring and probably no fun."

"I can take it," she said simply.

"You're not nearsighted or anything are you?" I asked, suddenly realizing I hadn't faced that problem. "You don't need glasses to read, I hope?"

"I've twenty-twenty vision," she said.

Thank God. Now we wouldn't have to train her to use contact lenses in addition to all the rest.

"I've had the Gettysburg Address, the Preamble to the Constitution, and seven Psalms typed on these two machines," I said.

"What on earth for?" she asked.

The coffee came and I poured out three paper-cups worth. One for each of us, one for the operator.

"Because I didn't want to use fashion copy. You're too good at it."

"What does that mean?" she asked.

"It means what I said," I replied. "You're too familiar with it. Too hep. I want to train you to use the Teleprompter on different material. That way you'll acquire the proper technique regardless of content."

"You're so clever," she said, half in flattery, half in jest.

"Practical is the word," I said.

"Now, first and foremost. You are supposed to read *without* giving the impression that you are reading. Your eyes are the give-away. It's a trick. Not easy to master. But once you get it, it becomes second nature."

"Yessir," she said.

"Remember, a lot of the biggest stars in television use this thing. Some have every word written on it. Only you and the viewing public don't know it. Don't even have an inkling that they haven't ad-libbed every word. That's how natural they make their delivery sound."

"Who for instance?" she said.

"Dozens. It's not important who. Just take my word for it. Most of these free-and-easy types you see in the daytime and figure they don't need a script. Well, they even have their own name and their chuckles written on Teleprompter."

"What'd they do before Teleprompters?" she asked.

"Everything was hand-lettered up big on cards and a stagehand held them up. We called them Idiot Cards."

"For obvious reasons?"

"For obvious reasons," I replied. "Well, enough talk. Let's get started. Mr. Sansone will roll the words. They're on that continuous piece of paper typed nice and large. He picks his

pace from you. Don't you follow him. He can slow down or speed up. Start reading, Mary."

"From which one?"

"Start with the Teleprompter on the left. Then, in a few sentences switch to the other one. They're synchronized so it won't be hard to find your place. Okay. Go."

"Four score and seven years ago," began Mary Cranston. At "all men are created equal" she tried to switch and lost her place and bobbled around a bit.

"Try the next," I said. "Keep a piece of it in your mind before you switch. And don't switch until you come to a break in the thought. Also look up before you put your eyes on the other prompter. Sort of in thought. Like this."

I did it. She imitated me.

Then she tried the prompter again and was better.

We went through Gettysburg and into the Constitution before I stopped her.

"Now look at me. Watch my eyes. See how I *sneak* a look at the words. Then I deliver my phrases while I'm looking away. Note how I phrase things in spurts though I read steadily. And I use my hands to help me break up the flow of what I say. To emphasize. Also I use my eyes to indicate I am *thinking* . . . thinking instead of reading. Watch."

I went through a Psalm and a half.

"Now you do it," I said.

It was a long, long lesson. And many followed. Mary was an apt pupil. After a while she sounded as off the cuff as Godfrey and as relaxed as Como. And she was prettier than both of them put together.

## *thirteen*

The big night had arrived.

Premiere they call them in the legit theater. But that's too fancy for TV. Especially when you think you've got fifty-one more of same to do to run out a contract—just to make the grade for a year.

I was too busy to be nervous. But still I knew I had to keep my mind occupied. A moment of reverie and I'd be chewing my nails off to the elbow. Plenty was riding on this night's epic. More than I ever had going for me before. And I wasn't only thinking of the account. I was thinking of Mary Cranston, too.

If the show flopped. If Mary went up on her lines or didn't deliver the way I knew she could (from the dozens of rehearsals). Well—I was responsible. So what? All there was left to do was cross your fingers.

I got to the studio early. In time to see all the on-camera run-through of the commercials. Mary was nervous as hell and it pitched her voice up a bit, taking out some of that wonderful tone it had. Not enough to be bad. But not good either.

She bobbled a couple of lines in the middle spot and the Teleprompter man told the assistant director to tell the

agency producer to tell her (a typical union-dictated chain of command) that she was looking for him to set her pace instead of the other way around.

She knew better. We'd been over this a hundred times. "He'll follow you," I'd kept saying to her. "Deliver it naturally. Phrase it like conversation. In spurts. Make it irregular, the way speech sounds. Don't follow him."

Going up on her lines made Mary even more upset. However, I still didn't approach her. I figured the less she saw of me now the better. There was nothing I could do but make things worse. So I sat in the back of the darkened house unnoticed. And I chewed a nail or two and watched in silence.

The time came—about an hour before air time—for dress. In a loose format show like this where there's no script, few set lines, no sure way of timing everything, a dress rehearsal is different. It's sort of a rundown for routining. It's sort of a haphazard way of getting what little language you do have, like the rules, timed out and the opening and the credits and the commercials. The rest of the business—what the contestants actually say or do—is, of course, not there.

So, as I said, it's a different dress rehearsal from any you've ever seen. Stand-ins from the agency and Kevin's outfit merely filled in as contestants. They stood up there with Bunny—who, by the way, was clowning it up so much I could tell he was sweating blood too. He was jovial and made with the Joe Millers to such a degree the director had to tell him to shut up a couple of times. Only in a politer way, of course.

By using stand-ins, it was possible for the camera crews to block out the two shots, that is where two people like Contestant A and Bunny would be positioned so the best angles would be gotten on the screen. And you got a rough timing, too.

By the time the dress had been run down, almost a half hour—the actual length of the show—had elapsed. Now all we had to do was wait for air time. Just about thirty minutes. It was during this period the Partners arrived.

I sat them in the sponsor's booth. This was on the floor above, overlooking the entire studio. Then I went back to my seat at the back of the house. They'd had trouble getting through the mob at the theater front. I was sort of glad. It made them aware somebody was interested. I didn't tell them that *any* half-promoted television show in our town can fill a theater three times over. People who can't plunk down eight dollars to see a musical. No wonder they're ready, willing, and eager to take in television free. It's got real live actors. And you're on the inside.

The downstairs was already jampacked and the ushers were shunting the mob up into the balcony. Still there was a line going right around the block waiting to get in. A few hundred would be just plain out of luck. If the show—they knew it was the opener—was a flop, they wouldn't care. If it turned out to be a smash, maybe some of those who didn't get in would cut their throats. This kind of blood I was hoping for.

The UBC ushers clad in their Johann Strauss costumes now strode through the aisles saying that cigarettes had to be put out. This is where young hopefuls get their start. They were young and wide-eyed and each one had lots of hair. Each blue-and-braided uniform had, inside it, a potential agency veepee. Or a network director. Or a floor manager at the very least. Some of these very uniforms had actually been inhabited by present-day television big shots from here to Hollywood.

It was a thrilling sight in a thrilling moment. If you didn't have anything at stake it was like a comic opera.

The Voice-Over—a nameless, never-to-be-seen announcer,

who was to read the words as the opening film went on and to introduce, again without his face being seen, the Master of Ceremonies, and who was to take the show off the air voicing the credits—appeared on stage and adjusted a standing mike to his mouth level. The audience quieted down without being told to. Mr. Voice-Over fixed a smile on his face and said “hello” to the mob.

This was his big moment. For about four minutes he was allowed to be a personality. It was his job to “warm up” the audience. He could now perform. A funeral would have caused this crowd to roll in the aisles. They were out looking for laughs. They were an ideal audience. Anything and they reacted. Ask ‘em to clap and they beat their palms raw. Tell them a crummy joke and they had to be quieted down.

Voice-Over went into his routine.

“Hello,” he bellowed into the mike again. Still no answer from the mob.

“Well,” he said. “What an impolite group. My mother always told me to answer when I was spoken to. I’ll try once more. ‘Hello.’”

This time the mob got the drift. They yelled in unison. It was deafening.

“That’s better,” said Voice-Over, showing all his nicely capped teeth. “That’s good. I think we’re going to get along fine.”

The ladies giggled. I suppose some of them thought he was cute.

“Now, let’s get acquainted with our neighbors. What do you say folks? Turn first to the person on your left. Then to the person on your right and tell them where you come from.”

Huh huh!

“Good. That’s good. Real neighborly. Like we all are here in New York.”

He raised his hand for quiet.

"Now let's see who came from the farthest part of the world to see our show. Hands, please."

He asked a hand upstairs.

"New Zealand," said the hand.

"Ah, New Zealand! Wonderful."

Thunderous applause. Half the mob probably thought it was somewhere in South America. What the hell. Applause! Applause! It doesn't cost anything.

"And you, sir," he said pointing to a hand at his feet. A stooge no doubt.

"Brooklyn!"

You'd have thought that this was the biggest yok ever conceived. It broke them up. Voice-Over was enjoying himself. So much so that he was being carried away. He only had two minutes to go and he had some important business to cover. The director's voice came through the playback. It sounded metallic. Hollow.

"Two minutes to go, George," it said. "Get on with it."

"That's our director," said George Voice-Over. "He's a great guy."

The mob applauded as if they just witnessed Cecil de Mille directing a Roman orgy.

"Now a word about the great *new* show you folks are going to see. You're lucky to be in on something that I personally think is going to be a television *hit!*"

I wished that his opinion gave me confidence. It didn't.

"You're going to meet some very learned people. And you're going to see them play a new game. Actually the new television version of a very familiar ole game. 'Put 'n Take.'"

Applause. Applause. Applause.

"These people over the weeks have a chance of winning half a million dollars. Think of it."



The mob cried, "Whew!" and talked loudly to their neighbors. They seemed to be interested in money.

Voice-Over silenced them.

"And in addition to the game itself you're going to meet two exciting new personalities—one an MC, who I think will be one of television's headliners in a few short weeks."

There he was, thinking again.

"His name is Bunny Lewis. Let's give him a big hand."

Bunny dashed from the wings grinning like a Cheshire cat. The crowd gave him all it had and it had plenty.

Bunny bowed and said something clever like, "Hi ya, everybody!" and took his place over by the big top suspended at stage right.

"And another newcomer—a lovely lady you'll all be seeing a lot of—spokeswoman for our sponsors—" here he salaamed, and it broke the crowd up—"the House of Karess—Miss Lana Lynn!"

Mary walked proudly across the stage. She smiled and bowed slightly. Her hair was piled atop her head. Her dress was green and clinging but not too much for the Bible Belt. Her face was radiant.

"Goddamit, she is beautiful," I thought.

The mob agreed and beat up a storm with its palms.

"One minute to go," said the voice of doom from inside the control room.

I settled back. The fat was in the fire.

Although I wasn't in the control room, I knew what was going on there. Each man behind a bank of instruments was poised. Kevin was probably rigid as a board as the sweep second hand on the clock rose toward the upright position.

Then Marty, the director, said, "Hit the opening film."

At stage left the twenty-piece band struck up the theme

in synchronization with the opening piece of film. I glued my eyes to the monitor nearest me.

A big top came spinning from nowhere and the name of the show zoomed up out of it. And then the words—"The House of Karess presents. . . ." Mr. Voice-Over was shouting into his mike, but the band drowned him out for us in the audience. This, however, was all taken care of inside the control room. There a proper balance was arranged so the old folks at home would know what the hell was going on.

The film faded and a long shot of Lana Lynn framed by a trellis of simulated dogwood and rambler roses dissolved onto the screen. Cameras pushed slowly in toward her as she spoke.

Mary Cranston, girl stylist from Fort Madison, Iowa, was on one hundred and eighty-four television stations.

She told who the sponsor was and what the House of Karess stood for. A second camera took a long shot of her again and while a parade of models, each wearing a House of Karess creation, filed by, "For cocktails," said Mary smiling at the scrawny brunette who slithered into view. "For evening wear" and another oozed along. "For sportswear." You got the idea that Karess could clothe you for everything including a dog fight. Every one of these girls was constructed like a bean pole. Their faces were all cheekbone. Their eyes were mascaraed slits and their mouths a gash of fuchsia. High in style. Higher in price. Merton Karamaz's uranium-plated sluts were on display. Mary handled the forty-five seconds of copy that described their clothes like a pro.

Then we dissolved back to a big bag of money as Mr. Voice-Over thundered that we were now about to bring to the one hundred and eighty-four stations television's newest bundle of love—Bunny Lewis; and Bunny pranced in.

Bunny explained the game and then introduced the first

guest—a kindly-type old colored woman whose subject was Abraham Lincoln.

Applause. Applause.

The old lady went as high as twenty-five hundred dollars and missed.

Everybody oohed and aahed and the House of Karess generously gave her a hundred dollars in cash and a cocktail dress. Now she could buy a hundred dollars worth of cocktails.

Thunderous applause. Applause.

Next guest. A former heavyweight boxer. Fought seventy-two fights until he became deaf and lost the sight of one eye.

Applause. Applause.

His subject: Great Art.

The crowd went wild.

He picked out a Rembrandt from a mess of prints. He spotted a Degas from a slew of dancing girls. He recognized a Rodin from a lot of small bronze figures that were shown him. He told all about Van Gogh cutting off his ear and Picasso painting "Guernica" and the kind of troubles Michelangelo had getting all that paint on the ceiling at the Sistine. It was terrific—and all through it Bunny Lewis was astounded, astonished, flabbergasted at the knowledge of the man.

Bunny mispronounced painters' names and was corrected by the boxer. He screwed up the pictures and was set right. All according to plan—the plan being to make Bunny as ignorant as the audience so they'd love him. It was lovable old Bunny from the start. It was superb.

This pug got up to eighty-five hundred smackers and decided to quit for the night.

Applause. Applause. It was deafening.

"He'll be back, folks. Next week. Just make sure you are," said lovable Bunny. "Maybe he'll put his eighty-five hundred

on the line. Maybe he'll be the one to take home that cool half a million. And now who's our next contestant?"

It was a fireman. A snotty type. We'd picked him because he was so snotty. His subject was the Bible. The crowd hated the s.o.b. Some of 'em even booed. An absurdly tough question knocked him off at \$780 and the crowd was glad. By golly, anyone ought to know the Book of Deuteronomy better'n that. The jerk!

Now it was Mary's turn again.

This was her big production number. As Lana Lynn she let the audience in on the new Paris colors, in all types of wear. It went on for two minutes and there were a dozen beautiful models and a limpid pool and a little French flower girl and three different sets that tied up all four cameras. By God, this was Fashion's answer to Oberammergau. And Lana Lynn came across great. Not a fluff or a flaw in her pacing. The way she handled the Teleprompter you'd think she was ad-libbing all the way.

Applause. Applause. Even for the commercials!

Next contestant: a dirt farmer from Mississippi. Just plain Ben, by cracky. But this rube knew all about big business. Think of it! Mergers. Stocks. Debentures. All that gobbledegook. Why the hell didn't he apply this knowledge to making some loot for himself? Ah, we made sure this was brought out subtly by none other than lovable Bunny Lewis, TV's newest MC-dreamboat. As subtly as a meat ax.

"I fin' there's peace 'n contentment in the soil," he wormed out of jes' plain Ben. "So I never let mah avocation interfeah with mah way of life. I'm a happy man, Mistuh Lewis. I don't inten' to change."

Maniacal applause! Even tears!

Ben got as far as four Gee's and time ran out. To the audience we'd just gotten started. They were dying for more.

"Ben'll be back, folks. Next week. You be, too," said Bunny.

Then came credits plus a short sign-off by "Lana Lynn for the House of Karess who brought all these wonderful people your way—and made it possible for their knowledge to be your reward." Then it was over.

The mob was ecstatic. Whistles. Cat calls. Foot stamping. If this crowd was any judge, we were in like Flynn. But you can't be sure. I pushed my way through to the stage.

"Bunny, you were great," I said grabbing his hand.

"Really, Rog. Jesus. I hope so." He was wringing wet.

Then I went over to Mary.

"Honey, you dood it," I said.

"How was I—really?" she said.

"Just lovely. Just perfect. I mean it."

"Oh you'd say that anyway."

"I would. But in this case, it's true. I haven't a single complaint."

"I only lost track of the prompter once. When they cut to the long shot on the other camera."

"I noticed. But no one else did. You recovered faster than Betty Furness."

"Was I really okay? Tell me the truth."

"I'd kiss you if there wasn't this crowd. You were wonderful. See you."

She nodded.

We were to meet at my place—in an hour.

I then dragged myself out back and upstairs to where the Partners were. Kevin was already there.

The sponsor's booth was jammed. All the UBC people were in it as well as Merton and Myron. With the show over they were on their feet and all talking at once.

When I opened the door, Kevin shouted at me, "Well, me boy, an' how do ye think we did?"

"I think we did fine," I said. "On top of a good first show, we had the biggest pre-promotion of any show I've ever worked on. We had dominant newspaper ads in all the major markets. Thousands of local-station show teasers all day long. And we pulled a real cutie for the TV columnists—sent a five-buck bill to every important one in the country saying we'd be giving away lots of same on TV's great new quiz. That got us plenty of free space in advance of the show. I know 'cause I saw over a hundred tear sheets."

"Well, I hope the ratings are gonna show it was worth it," Kevin said.

I pushed my way through until I got to the Partners.

"Well, what did you think?" I asked.

Merton scowled. "What's the good of my thinking? What did they think?" he said indicating the peasants who were still filing out on the floor below.

"We'll get a partial answer to that by early afternoon," I said.

"How?" asked Merton.

"Yeah, how can we tell?" said Myron.

"Well, by one or two o'clock I'll have a telegraphic Trendex report."

"Trendex?" said Merton.

"Telegraphic?" said Myron.

"Yeah," I replied. "Now that you're really in this racket I'm going to make eighteen-karat experts out of you. When I come over after lunch with the Trendex, I'll bring a presentation I have in my office, explaining ratings and what they mean and what they don't mean. Then you can get to be a Big Man in TV with the rest of us."

"We'll have another check by then," said Merton acidly.

"What's that?" I asked.

"My Partner and I have arranged to have the women's-wear departments in twenty leading stores in twenty different cities wire what sales results we've obtained. By noon their time."

"My God," I said. "Do you expect two commercials on a first program to show up the next morning in sales?"

"I do," he replied. "Fashion copy works fast. Or not at all. We pushed real salable numbers in those commercials. We had merchandising tie-ins, displays, local ads running in advance. Either this show and your friend, Miss Lynn, or whatever you now call her—either they do it. Or they don't. We want to know."

"You bet we do," said Myron. "I'm going downstairs to see Bunny Lewis."

"Say something to Mary, too," I said to him. I wasn't really being snotty. But Myron Essenger took it that way, of course.

"Would you and Mr. Karamaz like to join me in a drink?" asked Kevin.

"No thanks," I said. "Maybe Mr. Karamaz will. By the way, Mert, I'll see you about two-thirty tomorrow. I think we may all be surprised by this thing. I never saw a studio audience go off its rocker this way."

"I also hope we're surprised. Pleasantly," said Merton Karamaz.

I talked briefly with the UBC people. One of them told me the network switchboard was all lit up like a Christmas tree. People loving Bunny. People loving the show. People loving the contestants. People bitching about the fireman. People just phoning for the sake of phoning.

Most of the UBC men thought the show had come off well. But as usual they were too shrewd to enthuse. Wait till the ratings come in. Wait till the critics had their way. Wait till the client reacted via his sales. Then they'd give you an

opinion. A real fancy one with charts. Quite a daring bunch. I loved every one of them.

I said good night and went downstairs and out the stage door into the cool air of the evening. I figured I'd walk home. I could still beat Mary there by half an hour. She had make-up to get off and clothes to change. It was a nice night. I hoped it would be a nicer one for me. And a helluva fine day for me tomorrow.



## *fourteen*

When I got home I opened the windows and let the night air in to get rid of that closed-window stench that second-rate New York apartments seem to acquire. Then I went to work on the martinis. Then I put six LP records on the hi-fi. The first was that Sinatra thing called something about lovers and the last was an Ella Fitzgerald collection of oldies. Those in between these two were just as sinister.

I jumped around cleaning things up and putting on and off lights. I realized I was doing the Tom Ewell bit from *The Seven Year Itch*.

The bell rang and then she was standing in the doorway. I took her bag and her coat and pulled her over to the couch. I gave her a real professional-type kiss.

When we came up for air, I said, "You were sensational."

"Honest, Rog?" she said.

"Honest. I'm not sure how the public will react, but I'm betting it's the same way the studio crowd did. Charmed and disarmed. If you didn't sell those clothes, honey, they just aren't salable."

"I hope you're right," she said wistfully. "I do want to be good at this. Now that I've started."

"Well, we'll know more tomorrow afternoon."

"What do you mean?"

"Those gremlins you work for put a store check on to see how the commercials did."

"I wonder where."

"Twenty cities. Merton didn't say which."

"He probably took his twenty top-volume stores. They're all good merchandisers. And they were ready for this. If it has a chance, they'll turn out the sales."

"Let's talk about something else," I said. "I'm fed up with business. And you must be exhausted."

I poured us each a drink.

"That's funny coming from you," Mary said as she sipped her martini.

"What is?"

"Not wanting to talk business."

"Oh, come on now. You and I have talked art and New York and everything else."

"Not everything," she said looking at me very carefully.

"Well, what haven't we talked about that we should have?"

"Us," she said.

"Us?" I knew damn well what she meant.

"What is it all leading to?" she asked.

Sooner or later a woman always comes to this. But, God, why tonight?

"Look," I said, "if you think I'm the Sphinx or I've got the Delphic Oracle hidden in the john over there, Mary, you're wrong. I don't know where anything leads to. Even the second week of this show that's just gone off the air."

"I don't expect you to be a prophet. I just expect to find out what your intentions are, Rog."

"How the hell do I know what they are. I don't even understand my intentions toward myself."

She shook her head.

"You're being clever. Parrying everything I say."

"It's only because I really don't know. I haven't any pat answers. If you feel I've got to have everything in outline form so I can have it stenciled and sent out, maybe we should stop seeing each other."

"Maybe," she said "That outline business is unfair."

"I know," I said putting my hands up to her cheeks. "I know. I'm a bastard. But can't we stop with the analysis tonight? Any other night but now. I was just as worked up over this show as you. Just because I wasn't on camera—"

"All right," she said. "I'll stop. But remember, it's not forgotten. It's just tabled."

"Just table that glass and I'll refill it," I said. I filled both our glasses again.

It was a bright sunny morning. I felt great.

"After I shave and shower, I'm going to make breakfast," I said. "Eggs for milady, done how? Juice? Coffee?"

"Eggs fried. Juice. Coffee, black," said the lady sleepily.

I started toward what was laughingly known as my kitchen.

"Rog," she said.

"Yes, dear?"

"Don't shave now," she said.

"Okay, but why?"

"I want to watch. I always watched my father. I haven't watched a man shave since."

"Sure. I'll even use a new blade and make dangerous flourishes."

"Silly."

"I'll show off like hell with my speedy, staysharp fifty-nine-cent razor plus blade and World Series dope sheet."

"Okay, so I sound like a fool. A girl likes to watch a man shave."

"I didn't know they were that inexpensive to amuse."

“Especially when it’s a man she—she likes,” she said. “It’s sort of sharing his secrets.”

“My God, that’s Freudian,” I said. “And here I’ve been thinking of shaving all these years as just a way of getting rid of whiskers. I could have been the Casanova of Madison Avenue if I’d only known.”

“Shut up,” she said.

“I’ll go quietly, officer,” I replied.

## *fifteen*

It was two-thirty and I was in Merton's office. I had with me one of the most essential tools of our trade: A big, black binder with white, loose-leaf pages inside it. These binders fold back and become their own easel. The pages on this particular baby were busy with the loveliest colored charts you ever saw and chock full of numbers and words hand-lettered up large enough for myopic clients. We call it "a turnover" in our shop. Others refer to it as a "flopover." But no matter what the hell you call it, it's a big time Ad Game prop—just as vital to our business as roller towels in the johns.

I was setting up this turnover when Myron walked in. Merton was still out to lunch.

"Look," said Myron waving his hands wildly. I had never seen the man excited. "They're beautiful. Beautiful!"

He was referring to his fistful of telegrams.

I took them.

"NEVER SAW SUCH SPONTANEOUS ACTION BEFORE" said one. "WE SOLD OUT EVERY NUMBER BY NOON," said another. "IT TOOK FIVE DAYS OF YOUR COLOR PROMOTION LAST YEAR TO EQUAL WHAT WE DID THIS A.M. ALONE."

Glory be! What lovely words! They were signed by buyers

of well-known stores in various towns. One after another there was good news—big demand for the clothes shown in the commercials. Sale after sale made, with the customer commentary about what she had seen “last night on teevee.”

Merton walked in.

“Look, Merton, lookie here,” Myron said.

I handed the telegrams to Merton. He read each one. Twice. He grinned. Then he looked up at me. His face froze. His grin evaporated.

Never let the hired hands see that you’re pleased—it’ll cost you. That’s what the dear lad was thinking.

“What’s that thing on my desk?” said Merton.

“It’s something Norden dragged over,” said Myron. By God, Myron was getting vocal. Twice now he had said real sentences. Sentences that weren’t lifted or paraphrased from his partner. This could be a trend. Maybe success had gone to his vocal chords.

“It’s a short presentation explaining ratings,” I said moving over to the turnover. I flipped page one to a chart that had the word Nielsen on it, real big in red letters.

“Why the hell can’t you tell us by talking? What do you need that thing for?” asked Merton determined to cover the fact that he was happy by being bitchy.

“He thinks we’re stupid,” added Myron. “Agencies always do. That’s why they make those ABC kind of things for us.”

“Oh Jesus,” I said. “If you want me to give you the facts about ratings, I’ll do it. Furthermore, I’ll do it my own way. In primer fashion because it’s the easiest way *for me* to explain it. Not because you are dumb.”

“Proceed,” said Myron.

Even Merton looked at him. This man would bear watching.

“First, Nielsen. A method of telling audience size by use of a nation-wide sample. About eight hundred television

homes are equipped with an electronic gismo which records on a tape when the television set is on and which channel it's tuned to."

"You mean only eight hundred of these things are supposed to tell how many homes in the whole United States are looking in?" asked Merton.

"That's right. The sample is statistically sound. It's distributed according to population, types of TV homes, and so on."

"I doubt it," said Merton.

"Me, too," said Myron.

"It's hard enough to put on shows," I said. "I have no intention of devising a special rating system for you. If Nielsen is good enough for P & G and General Motors, as far as I'm concerned it's good enough for the House of Karess."

"What if the set's on and the family isn't looking?" asked Merton.

"Yeah, maybe they're in the can," said Myron.

"The average family doesn't have that many toilets," I said.

"Proceed," said Merton.

I handed each of them a small, oblong-shaped blue booklet. "For your breast pocket. This contains Nielsen's data. You'll be mailed two a month."

"For how much?" asked Myron.

"Due to your agency's costly subscription, your company may participate at reduced rates."

I flipped through several pages in the turnover, explaining as I went along. The Partners pretended to be bored. Inattentive. I could tell though that they were soaking it all up. I could also tell that sometime, how soon who could say, they'd be using these ratings against me. They'd be rubbing my nose in my own business.

Then I came to the page on Trendex. I explained the difference. How Trendex was done by telephone during the shows.

"As I told you, Nielsen gives you a picture of your audience size across the country," I said pointing to a set of blue bars. "The network line-up and strength has a lot to do with your Nielsen rating." Then I made with the pointer.

"But those green bars—" pointer again—"indicate the rating in the top fifteen markets. That's Trendex—strictly. Reflection of *program* strength. Every one of these markets has three or more channels."

"What are they?" asked Myron.

"He said the top fifteen," growled Merton.

I took out my gray Trendex pocket piece. I read off the cities.

Myron smirked.

Merton frowned.

I tossed the book to Myron.

"You can keep mine for the time being. You'll each get one of these next week—and then one a month thereafter."

"For a fee?" said Merton.

"At bargain rates, thanks to Roux & Day," said Myron.

"Precisely!" I said, bowing slightly from the waist.

"I now come to the most revealing page in this narrative," I said. I turned another big white sheet.

It was labeled in bold letters: "PUT 'N TAKE" TRENDX—21.3.

"I'm surprised you didn't ask me sooner," I said wagging a finger at them.

"You seem quite cocky," said Merton. "Therefore, I assume this is good."

"This is only great," I said. "Let me explain."

"Please do," said Myron.

I turned the next page. This was a pretty one. There were all colors here. And bars. And a graph. Everything.



"Here you see," I said, "just how this twenty-one Trendex rating translates into numbers of television homes."

"You mean we were in about four million homes last night? That's all?" asked Merton.

"Ah, ah," I said. "You've already forgotten Lecture Number One."

"Stop the fooling around and answer the question," Merton said.

I got back to business.

"This number of homes—four million—has an average of two point three viewers per set. So it becomes almost nine million viewers. But as we saw before, Trendex only measures the top fifteen markets. Our show you'll recall was on a hundred and eighty-odd stations."

"One hundred eighty-four," said Myron.

We stared at him once more. The monkey glands were at work again.

"Now it's fairly easy to be fairly accurate projecting a fifteen-city Trendex into a national Nielsen rating."

I flipped a page.

"We estimate our network Nielsen rating—which will appear in that little blue book a month hence—it takes Nielsen that long to get the data out—will be about a twenty-seven—or eleven million homes—twenty-five million people."

"That's all?" scowled Merton.

"What does it take to be in the Top Ten?" asked Myron.

"Stop pushing," I said. "For a new show this is phenomenal. In the first place, it only had pre-show promotion to build its audience. There's no habit, of course, to attract people. To the contrary, in fact. That little horror you gentlemen had in the time spot for some ten weeks had been smelling up one hundred and eighty-four channels—" I nodded to Myron here—"vividly. If an odor can be vivid."

"It can be," said Merton.

"That creates *dis*-interest in the time slot. Builds a habit for your competition. Sends people back to books and out to the movies by droves. So taking everything into consideration, a twenty-one Trendex—a twenty-seven Nielsen—is terrific."

"When will we be in the Top Ten?" said Merton.

"If ever—" said Myron.

"Who knows?" I said. "I think we've got something here. I think we're going to build and build fast. The next six to eight weeks will tell. We'll keep on buying weekly tele-graphics from Trendex—"

"You mean *we* will, I suppose," said Merton.

"Correct," I said flatly. "At one hundred bucks a throw for six weeks. We'll have two Nielsens under our belts. Then I think we'll have it made."

"I should think you would," said Merton.

"Now there is one thing to be done before I go over the press reviews of the show with you."

"I read them already. We read the papers you know," said Merton.

"I don't like to disillusion you, but there's more to the U. S. A. than New York City and Westchester County. Sometimes the people in Dubuque think differently. So I got Teletype reports from fourteen of our branch office cities with excerpts from what the local TV critics said."

"How are they?" asked Merton.

"Uniformly excellent. Not only for the show itself but for Bunny as MC, for your commercials, for everything! Frankly, I never saw a more favorably reviewed first show. Raves! I couldn't have done better if I'd written 'em myself."

"It is possible that you did," said Merton.

I glared at him.

"And when you add the indication of real sales pull we've seen," said Myron, "God, it's great."

Merton glowered his way. I smiled at him.

"The one thing to be done?" Merton reminded me.

"I want you to call Grant Baumgarten at UBC right now," I said looking at Merton Karamaz, "and tell him what you've just been over—the Trendex, what it'll mean in a Nielsen, what the critics across the country say—and then we put the bite on him."

"Let me do it," said Myron Essener eagerly.

Merton gave him a long, cold look. Maybe it wasn't really very long. But it was cold enough to freeze the nuts off an Alaskan hickory.

Myron retreated.

"When Grant has finished congratulating you, you congratulate him. After all, tell him he had enough perspicacity to see the greatness in this show. He forced his colleagues to put it in that time slot. At considerable expense."

"Ah, yes," said Merton rolling the words on his tongue like the memory of a great wine.

"Then tell him that no one knows better than he that the next six weeks are crucial. That's when *he*—remembered to say *he* not *we*—that *he* builds a viewing habit. Or *he* loses it forever."

"How true," said Merton.

"What do we ask for," said Myron impatiently.

"Shut up," said Merton.

"You then say that to protect his investment the network *must* take big tune-in ads on the TV page in every one of the Trendex cities for the next six weeks."

"Ah, lovely!" said Merton.

"Yeah, but what if he says no?" asked Myron.

"He won't," I answered. "The worst he'll do is scream a bit and say it'll cost him ten thousand dollars, which it will. And he'll probably ask you to share the cost. Perhaps take fifty per cent of it."

Now it was Merton that screamed.

"You can then refuse," I said, "if you want to. On the other hand, believe me, we *need* these ads. On the night of the show for the next six weeks," I repeated.

"I'll get them," said Merton grimly. "For nothing!"  
And he did!

## *sixteen*

It's hard to describe the meteoric success of "The Put 'N Take Quiz" without seeming to exaggerate. I guess anyone who has ever looked at a television show is fully aware of where this program went and how fast it got there. That is, from the viewpoint of the ordinary home viewer. But the statistics available to the folks in the business were even more startling.

For example, no show had ever before zoomed into the top ten ratings of all programs—both Trendex and Nielsen—in six weeks. Nor did any previous show ever put such a gap between itself and the Number Two show.

Furthermore, I don't think any show ever turned up such immediate sales results for its sponsor. The House of Karess really went to town. Its fashions of all kinds, shapes, and forms, in stores big and small, all across the country were in demand to a degree that no one in the advertising business, to the best of my knowledge, had ever experienced.

And along with this success went all the strange corollaries. Magazines, fighting for their lives against television, saw fit to feature Merton on cover and with lengthy articles inside. Business publications boasted of interviews with the

daring Partners and told of their skill in taming television. The inarticulate Myron made half a dozen speeches about television. He was an authority now. People asked his opinion, sought his views on television, on foreign affairs, on anything—everything. It was strange to see this man open up as a result. He changed completely. From an echo of his partner, he began to start conversations. From a carbon copy, he became an original. He'd toss the questions first. He'd throw the first knife. And as he became more and more sure of himself, that meant more and more trouble for yours truly.

On the show side, Bunny Lewis became the nation's leading heart throb, its newest philosopher, and its all-around, top-drawer woman's home companion. And the men liked him. And so did the children. Even kindly old grandmothers sighed a little when he came on camera. Sunday supplements of the newspapers, the country over, used him on the cover with reckless abandon, four colors, and frequency. Somebody ghosted a column for him in 312 newspapers. It dealt with life in general and his own philosophy in particular (though I doubt if he ever read what was written). Teen-agers wrote him mad, mad love letters. Girls in their twenties sent him pictures, offering innumerable blandishments if he'd only say the word. And lots more.

As for Mary Cranston, she was now known to millions—as Lana Lynn, of course—and she received an average of five thousand letters a week. Those that didn't request money requested other things, like advice on what to wear to a basketball rally or how to cure acne before the Junior Prom. It was all kind of frightening.

Some of it was kind of funny, too. Success can be in this land of ours. Take the following strange and silly for-instances:

The Ladies Bridge Club of Montclair, New Jersey, changed its get-together night—established for nine years—from Wednesday to Tuesday so everyone could be home to watch the show.

McAllister's Tavern on Third Avenue in New York City refused its denizens any form of bar service from five minutes before show time until five minutes after.

The Phone-a-Measure TV Rating Service was unable to supply a sufficient sample to get a rating during the half-hour "Put 'N Take" was on the air because so many people refused to answer their telephones.

The seventh grade of Endora High School, Endora, Colorado, petitioned the Governor for suspension of homework Wednesday nights.

St. Joachim's Catholic Church of Pittsburgh announced that television sets would be set up among the bingo tables Wednesday nights for the benefit of loyal "Put 'N Take" fans.

One million, seven hundred and three thousand, three hundred and seventy-four people joined Bunny Lewis fan clubs.

Reverend Wentworth Patterson, radio preacher, delivered a Sunday sermon on his program entitled "The Put 'n Take in Living."

Michael d'Annunziato of San Diego built a castle out of matchsticks, which he named the House of Karess and mailed it to the program, care of New York City.

Ten thousand, three hundred twelve teachers wrote letters to the sponsor complimenting him for the "uplift" he was bringing to education.

Lester McQuinlan, aged ten, wrote Lana Lynn that he wished he were a girl so he could wear "that nice dress you showed on TV."

Six hundred and fifteen urban appliance stores decided to remain open on Wednesday nights to meet the demand for downtown viewers.

A man named Farnley from Wichita shot himself because he was rejected by the program people. His sphere of knowledge was Sexual Aberrations.

The Cherokee Indian Tribe sent headdresses to Merton Karamaz and Myron Essenger and named them Honorary Sachems.

Fifteen hundred long-term prison inmates at the Federal Penitentiary in Illinois named Lana Lynn the girl they would most like to escape with.

Two competing fashion houses were so mad they fired their advertising agencies without notice.

The Governor of Minnesota named one of his ten thousand unnamed lakes Put 'n Take Lake.

The Governor of Kentucky made everyone on the show a Colonel.

Success meant other things, too. As the weeks rolled by, it taught us a lot about life. That is, the slice of it known as quiz-show contestants. Letters from and about contestants came in by the hundreds of thousands. We got snapshots of kids and of old ladies of ninety-six. Doting parents wrote us. Proud school teachers. And aunts. And neighbors. And all of 'em had some brainwave they were touting. This individual was the very end when it came to knowing every goddam thing there was to know about the Koran, or curling, or the life cycle of insects, or great love stories, or sculpture, or



mountains, or rivers, or what-have-you. You name it. We had people who knew it.

Why the hell did these folks work so hard to learn so much, usually about silly things? God only knows. Sometimes I guess it was sheer boredom with their jobs. Sometimes it was curiosity. Sometimes it was a way of showing off, making their presence felt. It would take a staff of psychologists to get the answer. I didn't have the time. Just enough to marvel at 'em all and what they had latched onto.

Contestants came at us with every kind of crazy gimmick you can imagine. For instance, we got a letter from a boxer. Actually, it wasn't the boxer but his manager who wrote. I guess that itself should have made us suspicious. Anyway, the letter was processed like always, with this one going to Alberta who was one of the first-readers on Kevin's staff. Alberta had a real nose for odd-ball contestants.

One day I was with Kevin working on next week's epic, and Alberta came in holding the letter plus a little snapshot of this fighter. He was a middleweight and looked it, with cauliflower ears and flat nose and all that go with them.

"This pugilist," said Alberta, who had an M.A. in Greek literature, "claims to know everything there is to know about women's fashions."

Well, naturally, our ears perked up. A boxer on ladies' fashions sounded great—not only for the show, but we figured it would be a helluva lead-in for an integrated commercial. Week after week, if he lasted. So Kevin said, "Let's investigate this one further."

"All right," said Alberta, "I will make a call right away. He is in Anaheim, California."

"They always are," said Kevin sadly. He was thinking of the expense not only of the phone call but of bringing this character here and holding him over in New York City until he found out if he could use him.

Now Alberta never mentioned it was the manager who wrote the letter or Kevin would have been more careful and probably made the phone call himself. He had gotten pretty experienced in smelling out the phonies—even over a long-distance wire.

To make a long story short, Kevin got this gentleman plus his manager all the way in here from Anaheim and put them up in a good hotel. During the interview he proved he did know something about ladies' fashions. A minute later his manager said, "Now just what sort of a *guarantee* does my boy get?"

Alberta was naive, but even she got the drift, so she turned the two of 'em over to Kevin right away. It boiled down to this: an outright demand that the show either tip his boy the answers so he got up to a certain sum or guarantee him in writing that much if he lost. Loverly.

"It is a custom in the fight game to get a guarantee," said this bum. So Kevin tossed the two of 'em out of his office with more four-letter words than they'd ever heard in the dressing room.

Another case concerned a kid—a variety of contestant that proved dangerous every time. Kids, as we all know, come equipped, generally speaking, with parents—meaning one mother and one father. Usually we found we could forget the father who was a meek-type character and embarrassed about the whole thing (unless he happened to be a lawyer, which often turned out to be true). Generally the fathers sat quietly in the back of the room while the little woman took over. And I do mean took over.

Our subject here was a brilliant-type nine-year-old female. She probably knew as much about atomic science as Dr. Vannevar Bush. We were glad to put her on the program, which we did, and she was fabulous. So were our ratings.

From coast to coast America tuned in to see the little

monster figure and divide and make with the reactivator-talk. You remember her. She breezed along into week number eight with no end in sight. It was glorious! Then one morning, the morning of the show to be exact, what happened?

This nine-year-old's mother walked into Kevin Antrim's office. Kevin put on his most polite manners, he told me later, and asked all the usual polite questions without using a single four-letter word. He was plenty leery of contestants' mothers from experience. Shortly this female parent came to the point: namely, that Kevin should put her *son*, aged twelve, on the show and right away. She didn't *ask*, mind you, she told him. His subject was also atoms.

Kevin pretended to take the idea very calmly, like it had real merit. He explained as he went along that people would resent the show's making such big sums of cash available to two members of the *same* family. Also that it was poor programming to have two kids so close together on the show, and doubly more so when they would both be going on the same subject. He also tried to tell her it wasn't fair to her and her husband (who was sitting on a chair in the back with his eyes on the floor) to subject them to the added strain.

"Unless I have your assurance that Harold goes on next week, my daughter will not be able to continue tonight," said this mother-lioness to Kevin. "I have a doctor's letter with me stating that my daughter is too young and it is affecting her stability. The doctor, by the by, is my brother-in-law," she said waving a letter under his nose.

There go the ratings, he figured. And the stink the papers would raise would be something. But what could he do? He agreed to put the boy on the following week, and then had to get rid of the little girl though we'd been planning on her for weeks more. A real curve of a question, specially prepared, and it was good-by to the kid.

One more example: This revolved around what we called a Running Plot. The plot got hatched when one of the researchers down South came up with an Old Crow who knew every love story ever written almost word for word.

When Kevin described this gal as an Old Crow, he was maligning the species, crow. Even when she got dressed up to take off from the one-horse town she lived in in Arkansas to come up here, she was the scrawniest-looking thing you ever saw.

In fact, this was what gave us the idea for a "Running Plot." We decided to start her at the same time we started a lovely young doll, all scrubbed and pretty and with a good build, whose category would be Horror Stories. Good programming—love stories and horror stories. An old crow and a doll. It felt real fine. Only trouble was we didn't have any young lovely doll who knew anything about horror stories.

We had 'em on movies and mathematics and spelling. Atoms and baseball and billiards. Almost everything but horror stories. So we sent out an S.O.S. To all researchers across the United States plus our newspaper contacts: be on the lookout for a good-looking chick who knows horror stories. In the meanwhile we kept the Crow up here on ice at the Waldorf-Astoria. She ate three meals a day and slept in an air-conditioned room while the researchers scoured the forty-eight states. Naturally, nobody paid any attention to her during this period. All they did was pay her bills.

One day there was a phone call from a place called Valdonia, Kentucky, population seven hundred. There was a babe there who looked like Ava Gardner even up close, and had read every horror story in the world. She could tell you what Frankenstein's middle initial was although the author dropped it during the first revision of the manuscript.

"Get her in quick," Kevin said.

So for some reason this gal decided to drive up to the big

city although we provided plane fare. At the very same time Kevin got Alberta to call in the Old Crow to his office for a briefing. Remember, we had not even seen her for several weeks.

Well, in walked the Crow that P.M. I was over there. And no one even recognized her. Living at the Waldorf-Astoria for several weeks had put her next to beauty shoppes and dress shoppes and drug stores that sell all sorts of wonderful lotions, and she had gone and gotten herself a permanent, a new wardrobe, and an over-all scrubbing. This made her not only look human but almost good.

And, as if that wasn't enough, on the way up to N. Y. C. our doll got into an accident and cut her scalp which required eight stitches plus all her hair shaved off. So when she arrived, she looked pretty much like a horror story herself.

End of Running Plot.

MEMO TO: THE ENTIRE ORGANIZATION

FROM: HAROLD ROUX, PRESIDENT

Effective today Trevor Towne from our St. Louis office will be Account Executive on the House of Karess account. We all know Trevor's wonderful work on the Webster Chewing Gum account in St. Louis. Trevor will move here at once and will be followed by his family later. Les Jolliffe will go to St. Louis to take over on Webster.

MEMO to: MERTON KARAMAZ CC. MYRON ESSENGER

FROM: ROG NORDEN

Due to the difficulties encountered by Les Jolliffe, our present account executive, in addition to your frequent complaints, we are removing him from your account. Our new man will fly in at once from St. Louis, where he now is an important account man, and will be presented to you then. Since this move necessitates the shifting of two entire families, we hope that you find Mr. Towne as able as did the

Webster Chewing Gum people. They relinquished him most reluctantly.

A scrawled note on my memo to Merton in the handwriting of Merton Karamaz: "We are open-minded as always. But what has chewing gum got to do with fashion advertising?"

Also returned to me, by Myron Essenger: the carbon of the memo I sent him. On it was written: "I doubt it."

## *seventeen*

I had just come out of a program session and hurried back to the office when my girl said that Lansing Thompson, vice-president in charge of programs at MBC, UBC's big competitor, was on the phone.

"Hi," I said to him.

"Howdy, son," he said to me. "I guess you're pretty much the big shot."

"I could be, but deep down I'm still my own modest, lovable self."

"I figured as much," he said. "That's why I'm calling."

"You mean you want me to appear on one of your Sunday morning religious hours?" I said.

"Not exactly," he replied. "I want to make you a proposition."

"Okay, what is it?"

"How would you like to move the show over to MBC?"

"You mean out of the kindness of our hearts because it's clobbering you?" I said.

"No, I have an inducement," said Lansing.

"Proceed," said I.

"Supposing you were to move right across, same day, same time spot but on our network. We'd deliver the same num-

ber of stations, same coverage, of course. Plus this," he said. "Your client is in the business of talking to people, and I don't have to tell you our owned and operated stations cover about thirty per cent of the whole U. S. TV market. Well, we'll clear a million dollars worth of spot announcements plus two half hours between seven and eleven P.M. which I'll turn over to you to program any way you want—for *nothing*."

"In other words, you're offering a heavy spot schedule *and* two half hours a week—"

"*Prime* half-hours for fifty-two weeks," he interrupted.

"Yeah, I know," I said. "It's worth while all right. Major markets and all that. It would cost Karess about fifteen thousand per week to fill the half hours, regardless of what type of shows we put in there—if they're first-runs."

"You'd be getting about two and a half million worth of time for nothing. On a fifty-two week basis, that is."

"For this I suppose you want 'Put 'N Take' on a firm fifty-two week contract?" I asked.

"Naturally," he said. "I'm not crazy."

"Well, if nothing else, it does show interest in the program."

"It shows we're willing to do something big to get you over here. Think it over and let me know. But soon."

"How about putting it in writing so I can take it up with the client?"

"You mean so you can take it to UBC and see what they'll do to match it?"

"I give you my word I won't do that," I said.

"I believe you," said Lansing, "but I can't take the chance. Anyway, this isn't the type of thing you put in writing. I may have to deny I ever said it. If our other network advertisers heard we were *giving* away time, they might resent their bills."



"I'll have to tell the Partners, of course. I doubt if I can prevent them from mentioning this to the network."

"I don't expect you to," said Lansing. "That's why there'll be no letter."

"I'll get back to you, Lansing," I said, "and thanks."

"Please do and soon. We've got a lot of time spots we have to do some work on. I need to know how we stand with you."

I went right over to Merton Karamaz's office and told him what had happened. He called in Myron and the brace of legal eagles. Everybody jabbered a lot. It was quite exciting for them. Obviously, they liked being in demand by the country's leading television networks. Also there was the little item of the free time—two and a half million bucks worth of it—that didn't exactly horrify them either. When the commotion had subsided somewhat, Merton looked at me and said, "Well, what do you think?"

It wasn't so much his showing an interest in my opinion. It was more of a defiance, meaning: You're paid to have answers. So give!

"I don't think we should do it," I said.

"Why?" said Merton.

"You're very free with our money," said Myron.

"I'll tell you why," I said. "First, there is a little item like the fact that UBC did agree to go along with the show. In other words, they took the gamble. I think we owe them something for this."

"You mean like a Boy Scout merit badge?" asked Merton.

"We'll have one made up," said Myron.

"That's only part of it, but I think you should consider it," I said. "Furthermore, now that you have such a close contact, Mr. Karamaz, with the top brass at UBC, I daresay you might want to pick up the phone and talk to Grant Baumgarten."

"And tell him about this," said Merton, baring his teeth

in what might be construed as a smile. "Ah, I see. Very lovely."

"I needn't tell you what to say, I imagine."

"No, this one I don't need help on," said Merton Karamaz.

"I'd like to do it," said Myron Essenger. Everyone stared at him, including Merton. He retreated.

"I'd like to be here when you do it," I said. "To make sure their counter offer is worthwhile. There are some areas in which you're not quite up to me," I said. "Yet!" I added.

"Everybody out but Myron and Norden," shouted Merton. "Get Grant Baumgarten on the phone," he said to his girl. He rubbed his hands, waiting for the phone to ring.

Though I only heard his end of it, it was a lovely conversation. I doubt if it took more than two years off the life of Grant Baumgarten or sent his blood pressure up more than thirty points. As for Merton, he was very calm and quite precise.

"By contract, we have to let you know one month before our twenty-six-week commitment is up," he said to Grant. "I think you'd like to be looking ahead further than that so you know where you stand—whether it's together or separately. That's why we should settle this now. It'll be easier for us both to plan, and planning is the essence of orderly business, isn't it, Mr. Baumgarten?" said Merton Karamaz.

I don't know what Baumgarten replied. I can only imagine. Following which he must have asked for time to breathe and discuss the matter with his program people. He promised to get back to Merton in the afternoon.

"Early, please," suggested Merton. "We are keeping so many people waiting."

At 2:05 that afternoon a messenger from Grant Baumgarten's office arrived at the office of Merton Karamaz. He carried an envelope and inside it was the following offer:

For free, five fifteen minutes of daytime—a strip Monday through Friday—at 1:30, where they could concentrate on talking to the housewife and where real cheap programming was possible. The program to be placed there must be acceptable, the letter stated, but this was merely a form. The only assurance the network wanted was the firming up of the “Put ‘N Take” contract for another twenty-six weeks. For this they had topped MBC’s offer with three million dollars’ worth of free time on the whole network.

After I had finished reading the letter, I said to Merton, “Well, you did it. Sign it and I’ll start thinking about what daytime show should go in there.”

“I wouldn’t bother with that last if I were you,” said Merton Karamaz.

“What do you mean by that?” I said.

“I *have* decided what daytime show we will put in the one-thirty slot,” he said flatly.

“That’s very nice,” I replied. “Would you mind telling me what it is?”

“Not at all,” he said. “Last week our other advertising agency made a very clever suggestion.”

“Bully for them,” I said.

“They suggested that our new star saleswoman, Miss Lana Lynn, be put on daytime television in her own show. Isn’t that clever?” he asked me, smiling broadly.

It *was* smart, and I wished I had thought of it. But I’d be damned if I was going to admit either of these things to him.

“What will she do? Read stock market quotations?” I asked.

“The general run of daytime television—talk to the audience, play games. It will be what we call a loosely formatted show.”

“Oh, is that what we call it? That’s what the other agency called it?”

“Yes. Very appropriately so, don’t you think?”

I didn’t answer.

“In other words,” I said, “you don’t feel after bringing you ‘Put ‘N Take’ and building the character of Miss Lana Lynn for you that our agency should program this time slot for you?”

“I do not,” said Merton Karamaz.

“Me either,” said Myron Essenger.

I turned around and started out of his office, and as I was walking toward the door, Merton Karamaz spoke to my back.

“And by the way, Mary Cranston’s contract for the new program will be negotiated by the other agency.”

## *eighteen*

The morning after each show we'd hold a session in Merton's office. We called them post mortems because we dissected the previous night's program. We discussed what was good. What was bad. What contestants were scheduled for the next week. What we were lining up for the weeks ahead. It was like plotting a military attack. Kevin, myself, and the Partners were the General Staff.

At one of these p.m.'s we decided to do a remote broadcast. I suggested it, in fact. A remote is an actual telecast done on the spot. In other words, out of the studio. This was not to be for the whole show, but for just one of the questions for just one of the contestants.

By getting the cameras outside somewhere and framing a special question relevant to a particular location, I figured we would add a new dimension to the show. Maybe get us talked about even to the extent of getting one of the picture magazines to do a special piece on it.

Anyway, the Partners decided okay, even though it was to cost them five thousand (at least) extra. They left it to me

to figure out some place for the remote. It was then that a lovely but somewhat ulterior idea occurred to me. I'll tell you about that part of it later.

Where to go? Some place interesting enough to cause talk, yet not too expensive to throw a signal from. The phone company charges you through the nose for laying the special lines necessary to carry the signal from the location to the nearest TV station. That's in addition to the added expense of maintaining cast and crew on the road.

It was after Kevin described a contestant he had on tap for future weeks that the place for the remote occurred to me. He was describing a cute little trick who was Malayan. Her subject was baseball and that gave me the idea. Do her question right out of the Baseball Hall of Fame in Coopers-town, New York.

Kevin had pictures of the girl and he showed them to us. She looked great. Up at Columbia University, where she was living as an exchange student, one of her roommates had found out this kid was a real Einstein in baseball. Knew everything from batting averages to when is the best time to pull the hit-and-run. With the World Series coming up, this looked like great timing. We called her in.

She turned out to be a doll. Little and pretty. Like something out of the *National Geographic*. And she had a British accent, which made her even better since baseball was her subject. Her name, by the way, was Mai-Mai, which was a definite plus, and she was willing to wear native costume.

I could see our Nielsen shooting up to where it hadn't been since the first months on the air—if we kept this kid going long enough. The novelty of the show was wearing out. The remote could start things up again.

The ulterior part of the idea was this: to get Mary sprung from her daytime show so she could spend some time away with me. The excuse would be to do a live middle-com-

mercial on sportswear actually in the Hall of Fame. I knew the Partners would buy it. And they did.

Mary and I flew to Albany, where I rented a car at the airport and drove about fifty miles to a motel on Route 20. The place had been recommended by the Automobile Association. I had my girl check the day before back in New York.

It was late and pitch-black when we arrived. There was an old guy in charge of the office. He was wearing glasses and an ear device. I guess he was one of the few people in America who didn't recognize Lana Lynn. If he did, he certainly didn't show it.

We each signed the book and I asked for adjoining rooms. He didn't seem to care about that either. I don't think he gave a damn about anything.

The Kozy Korner Motel was one of those symbols of America-on-the-march. A florescence of the internal combustion engine. It was long and low with joined rooms that were separated by thin plaster walls and made accessible by thin plywood doors. It had white-painted shingles outside and an interminably long, sloping gray tile roof, which gave it that nice "your home away from home" look.

The old guy opened the doors to Numbers Ten and Twelve and flipped on the lights. I lugged the baggage in from the car. Then I parked the buggy out back where he had told me to and went inside to my room. Mary was in hers.

First thing I had to do was to determine the state of the nation. Between the rooms, that is.

I unbolted my side of the door and knocked.

"Mary, switch the bolt," I said through the plywood. She did. Our home away from home doubled in size—as well as in interest.

"This is a charming room," I said assuming the role of

realty salesman. "It comes equipped with the biggest, blondest television set on the market. Life-sized, twenty-seven-inch screen. And note these twin beds with their colorfully tufted comforters. But here, ma'am, is the *pièce de résistance*—the water glasses in the john are completely encased in cellophane. Think of it! Not a germ can get to them or to you. And as if that isn't enough, the face cloths are in wrappers, and there's a strip of paper across the seat in the john to prove to you no one has sat since the last cleaning. Madam, I can safely say without fear of contradiction that your Teahouse of the Cooperstown Moon is one hundred per cent sanitary and two hundred per cent lovely."

Mary didn't think it was funny. She was in one of those moods. Here we were a million miles from civilization. No one knew us. Only a day of work before us and four nights alone together. And she's morose. Women!

The more I tried whimsey, the more moody she got. Finally, I was so damn funny she retreated behind the plywood that separated our rooms without even saying "good night" and threw the bolt with a vengeance. I got the message: "Stay where you are, buddy."

I got undressed and crawled into the Kozy Korner's version of a bed and dropped off. After three hours of tossing, that is.

Baseball's Hall of Fame in Cooperstown is a colonial deal with a red-brick exterior, two white columns, a white arch, and white marble steps leading to it. When Mary and I arrived at the place, the crew from the network and the people from the phone company were on the spot. They'd been working the day before, in fact. A truck, the network letters printed on it big in gold, was drawn up at the door. Men were running cable from it up the stairs into the build-



ing and through several of the side windows. Others were carrying lights and mikes.

I introduced myself to the head man from the phone company. He told me his survey had proved a tower wasn't necessary to get the signal out. This was a break because it would save money. Building a tower is expensive. A signal could be sent from the truck directly to Albany, relayed to New York, and then south to the other stations on the network.

"We're going to need five cameras," I told the crew chief, "two on the first floor, two on the second, and one outside."

I walked through the building, casing the joint to see how it checked out with the floor plan Kevin and I had seen in New York. The questions for Mai-Mai had already been prepared, and I wanted to get a good look-see at the inside to see just where we'd have to stage them. In every corner of the building there were banks of lights and mikes and other equipment. I was joined by several of the network people.

"I don't know the specific questions," I said to them. "No one does. But I can give you an idea of the areas we'll use."

A junior-grade director took down everything I said.

"These display tables contain trophies and documents and records," I said, indicating them with my hand. "They could be in one part of the question. Which tables, I can't say. I think we can get the glass tops removed to prevent glare. Will one of you find out about this?"

The junior-grade director detached himself from the group. Another took his place.

"Furthermore, we have permission to allow Bunny to handle the displays. He'll be careful. However, nobody else must touch anything. Is this understood?"

All heads nodded.

"You've got to make sure one of the cameras in this room

gets high enough to shoot down on the exhibit cases. You'll be able to dolly between the tables.

"The contestants and Bunny will wear lavalier mikes around their necks. This means they've got to walk slowly. They'll be dragging wires. But when they move from the first floor to the second floor, one of your crew can appear on camera—I don't mind his being seen—and remove the mikes from their necks. Another can hand them replacement mikes upstairs.

"For our opening shot we want the exterior of the building. We'll only have one camera outside for this. I think we should walk the girl in, up the stairs, to Bunny. It should be a nice long establishing shot."

"How about a recording of something like 'Take Me Out to the Ball Game' to fill until she gets inside?" asked the local director. His name was Dan something.

I shook my head. "Too corny. I'd rather have silence," I said. "I think it's more impressive."

The heads nodded again. "As soon as we get inside, we should pan this wall with the plaques on it. Some or all of them will be in the first part of the first question. I'm sure of that. Now the printing on them will be masked. The questions, I believe, will deal with what's under them. It would be a good piece of business if Bunny not only reads from his cards after the girl delivers her answers, but also rips the masking tape off the plaques. This will mean we need close shots of each plaque and lots of light on them.

"Now," I said, "the most impressive part of the question will be focused here. This is the Babe Ruth alcove." I pointed to it. The Babe's Number 3 shirt was hanging there. We stood around and gaped at it a while.

"Let's go upstairs now," I said. "We ought to be able to pick up this plaque to Eddie Collins at the foot of the stairs, and maybe we can pan across the pictures up here of the

Presidents of the United States standing in their boxes to throw out the first ball. Another part of the question deals with these pictures. Probably something about who are the presidents and what teams won the pennant while they held office. We'll have to shoot down on them with our second floor cameras." We walked on.

"The final part of the question has something to do with this bust over here. It's De Wolf Hopper, the actor who made 'Casey at the Bat' famous." I stopped walking. The group gathered around me. "Well," I said, "those are the areas we've got to be prepared to cover. It's going to take a lot of dry runs as well as a dress rehearsal.

"One more thing," I said. "We're going to have to clear everything out of the far part of the first floor because that's where we stage our big production number of the middle commercial.

"We'll want to move some displays behind them and other stuff that will add interest to the setting. Since we only have two upstairs cameras on the floor for the commercial, we'll have to break one of them fast from the show."

The kid wrote furiously on his pad.

I said "so long." I had to make a phone call so I hurried out. I had promised to look up Art Potter, an old boss of mine at Roux & Day, who was retired and living just outside of Cooperstown. I'd told him I'd take him to lunch, and we'd talk over the good old days. Also I figured Mary would like to meet him.

I went to a phone and set up the date with Art.

He was a wizened old man with a matchstick frame, and the flesh that was stretched over it was wrinkled and yellow like parchment over a cheap lamp shade. His face was lined and grandmotherly, and you could tell his false teeth gave him trouble. For hair he had a fringe above each ear. Only

his eyes had the sparkle I remembered. They were still warm and kind of alive and amused.

"Well, well," he said from the chair in the restaurant hall. "It's good to see you, Rog. It sure is."

I went over to the old guy and put my arm around him. I doubt if he weighed a hundred pounds. I almost felt like crying for some stupid reason.

"Howdy, Art, how are you?" I said. "God, it's nice to see you."

"You're doing great, boy," he said. "I hear all about you. Folks write me. I read all the trade books." He struggled to his feet.

"I'm doing fine—thanks to you," I said. "You started it all."

"Isn't either of you going to introduce me?" said Mary.

"Oh, gosh, excuse me, honey," I said. "Mary, here's the greatest guy I ever worked with. The man who was my first boss at Roux & Day—Art Potter—this is Mary Cranston."

"I know her already. As Miss Lana Lynn," grinned Art. "She's even prettier than on the TV."

"He still slings it around," I said to Mary. "Art was Roux & Day's top copy writer for twenty-five years or so."

"Only for the tough accounts. Pills. Deodorants. Cigars. Not for any of this fashion stuff. I never understood that kind of copy. I always handled the mail-order kind."

We went inside to the restaurant part of the place. Art walked very slowly and with a crutch. One of those aluminum jobs that fits around your wrist.

The restaurant was Simulated Early American in every detail. The lighting was converted oil lamps, and there was a big wagon wheel on the ceiling in the middle of the room with bulbs all around its perimeter. The walls were pine-paneled, and you could tell the wood had been gouged and stained to make it look old though it had probably been up

less than two years. Poor reproductions of Currier & Ives were hung helter-skelter on the paneling, and the waitresses were dressed like Priscilla Alden. They wore gray dresses and white collars and had big white bows in the rear. It was sheer pageantry—even on the \$1.95 blue plate.

One of the Priscilla Aldens seated us at a table and lit a beeswax-type candle in a pewter-type candle holder. Then she filled the milk-glass reproduction water tumblers. I helped Art into his chair and then Mary, and sat down myself.

"Well, well, a lot's happened since you first walked into my office, Rog," he said. "I guess you're not damp behind the ears any more."

"Nope," I said. "I've dried off."

"You mean to tell me this man was ever naive?" said Mary.

"And how," I said to her.

"He was real shy once also," said Art. "And he was a solitary soul, too. Did everything alone. Went to art exhibits. To shows. Read a lot. He kept to himself mostly."

"I can't picture it," said Mary.

"I didn't realize this was to be a panel discussion on me," I said. "It's a fascinating subject. I'll be glad to moderate."

"Changed, hasn't he?" said Mary pointedly.

"Think maybe I ought to tell Mary about the only real squabble you and I ever had?" asked Art.

"Go ahead," I said.

"Rog was helping me on some cigar copy. I made him do it over ten times," said Art grinning as he recalled the incident.

"Yeah," I said. "All for some lousy trade ad that wouldn't be read by fifty people."

"He brought the ad in for the tenth time and put it on my desk," said Art.

"I remember," I said.

"As he turned to leave, he said, 'If this had been the Lord's Prayer, you'd still want a change.'"

"We used to have a lot of laughs," I said. "Everything seemed more fun. We worked harder in those days. But we had a ball. Nobody ever left at five o'clock. The kids that come in for jobs today ask what our pension plan is or how many vacations a year we give or how long it takes to get in on the Christmas bonus. I don't know what's happened," I said.

"You're getting older," said Art.

"Don't remind me," I said. "Say, Art, tell Mary the yarn about you and the stock market."

"Oh, that," laughed Art, "think she'd be interested?"

Mary insisted.

"Well, back in nineteen twenty-nine, wherever you'd go, you'd run into somebody who had just made a killing in the stock market. On paper, of course. You'd get your shoes shined and the kid would say, 'Just made a hundred thousand dollars in Amalgamated Underwear.' You'd get your hair cut and the barber would tip you off that United Tooth and Comb was going like a house-a-fire and that he just made three hundred and twelve thousand dollars. Somebody at the A. & P. would tell your wife that she'd better put every last cent into U. S. Acme because she had it on reliable authority it was going up fifty points. And it would.

"You couldn't turn without getting a tip on the stock market or without hearing about somebody who had just made a killing. Well, I listened every place I went and then forgot what I'd heard. Never bought a share until one day I decided it was high time I got rich, too. So I called up a broker and bought one-hundred shares of something or other. That was on October twenty-eighth, nineteen twenty-nine.

"As soon as my order was placed, J. P. Morgan picked up the phone and called the country's leading brokers. 'We've got him boys,' he said. 'Pull the string!'"

"I've told that story a thousand times," I said.

Our Priscilla Alden came over with the drinks. Then we ordered the food.

"What's it like being retired, Art?" I asked.

"Really want to know?" he said.

"Sure," I said. "Maybe I'll be doing it some day."

"I'll give it to you straight," he said. He leaned back and pointed his thin, lined face at the wagon wheel. "When you retire," he said, "you've got to learn to live in a world of women. At first when the phone rings you hurry over, thinking it's for you. It never is. You learn better.

"Then you figure you'd better get something to do. Something to get you out of the house. So you decide to help the wife with the marketing. You've become a package carrier. And what happens then? All the things on the shelves that were interesting and exciting when you were making ad campaigns for them—now all of them are dull as dishwater. They're just cans and boxes and cartons with no personality and no fun in them.

"I had to find a way to lick this. And I did. It kept me from going out of my mind.

"There are a few men in this little town who'll put up with my shenanigans. Thank God for them. I got them to join the underground. In our battle against women." Art winked at Mary.

"For example, there's Rudy," he went on. "Rudy runs the butcher shop. He let me organize a one-cent sale a couple of weeks ago. Never had one before. I talked him into it. Told him I was the greatest authority on advertising east of the Mississippi and to leave things to me. I got down to his

butcher shop early one day and hung up big hand-lettered signs: *One-Cent Sale Today Only—chicken heads formerly five cents now two for six cents—turkey feathers formerly twelve cents now two batches for thirteen cents.*

"It caused a lot of talk. Confused a lot of women. They didn't know quite what to make of it. Rudy and I had a big laugh."

Mary and I did too.

"Then there's Max, who runs a local grocery," said Art. "Max'll put up with practically anything. We pulled this about a month ago. Very successful, too.

"Friday is Max's busiest day. All the women are in there buying like crazy for the week end. I waited till the mob was at its height. Then I pushed my way through and got up real close to Max at the cash register.

"I took a big wad of five-dollar bills out of my pocket. All of 'em nice crisp fresh bills. I'd just got them from the bank. I held up one to the light. 'How do they look, Max?' I said, kind of loud. 'Just finished them.' Max took the bill and looked it over real carefully. 'Art, you get better every time!' he said.

"Well you should have seen those women. I'll tell you one thing—they wouldn't take any five-dollar bills from Max that day."

The food came and Mary saw in a flash what the score was. I wouldn't have. Without being asked, she helped Art cut his meat. I didn't realize his left hand was paralyzed. That was why he seldom went anywhere without his wife. After lunch we had to hurry back to the Hall of Fame to rehearse. I told Art to bring his wife with him, and I'd seat them right under the cameras for the show. I was sure they'd enjoy it. And it would give him something to think about, something to do.



We said good-by and hurried off.

We had about seven dry runs before an actual dress rehearsal on camera. After dress there were about fifteen minutes left until air time. I was kind of nervous so I went out for some air and stood on the top step underneath the white arch and watched the local cops holding back the crowd that had gathered.

I smoked two fast cigarettes and went back inside the building.

The Potters were seated over in a corner out of the way but still within good view of all the goings-on on the first floor. Art was in his seat, puffed up like a pigeon. It was good to see him enjoying himself.

I waved to them and then went over to a monitor in the rear to watch the show. There were now three minutes to go. Now two. Now one. Then it was air time. The monitor in front of me gave itself over to a station break sponsored by a local Chevy dealer and then a station identification tagged with a beer jingle. Then it was our time.

As per usual, New York hit the opening film. Next they went right into a one-minute commercial. On film this time because Mary was up here. Now came the first contestant—still in New York. He was a thirty-year-old sanitation-department worker—we used to call them garbage men—and his subject was grand opera. He had a handlebar mustache and an accent. Other than that, there wasn't much to him. He got up to about a Gee on Puccini and lost. This consumed about seven minutes. The audio for his interview came from Cooperstown via Bunny Lewis who did it over a standing microphone while he followed the video on the monitor. It was kind of eerie—the MC's voice coming from up here interviewing somebody on camera in New York. But it went off smoothly enough.

As soon as the garbage man stumbled off with his consolation prize, the red light came on on Camera One in Cooperstown. That was the camera outside the Hall of Fame. It picked up most of the exterior plus Mai-Mai marching along the path and up the steps through the door of the building. Here Bunny greeted her. We cut to Camera Two inside. Bunny and Mai-Mai made with the small talk as they headed over to the bronze plaque on the wall, stage left. Bunny was describing as he went what the Hall of Fame represented in baseball history and how it had been put together and some of the legend behind it.

The two drew up before the plaques. Then Bunny opened the envelope and took out the first part of the question. Camera Three dollied into a tight shot of the first plaque and Bunny asked Mai-Mai whose face it was and what teams he played on.

Without hesitation, she said Cy Young and that his teams had been Cleveland, St. Louis, Boston, then Cleveland again, and finally Boston. I knew the studio audience in New York would be applauding like hell.

We panned over to the next plaque.

"This is Wee Willie Keeler," said Mai-Mai. "He coined the phrase, 'Hit 'em where they ain't.'"

It was kind of cute hearing her deliver this information in her British accent. She then said Wee Willie had been a Giant, an Oriole, with the Brooklyn Superbas, and the New York Highlanders. I had never heard of the last two teams. The kid was great.

Three more plaques and she had covered Honus Wagner, Christy Mathewson, and Napoleon Lajoie. Then we moved to the Babe Ruth alcove and here Mai-Mai was tremendous. She went through a four-part question on The Babe that was brutal. I could practically hear them going crazy back in the studio in New York.

"Now let's go upstairs to the second floor," said Bunny. A stagehand came in and took the mikes off Bunny and Mai-Mai.

"But first, a word from the House of Karess," said Bunny.

We now did a fast dissolve to the rear of the first floor and picked up a medium shot of Karess's own Lana Lynn surrounded by ten models wearing Karess sports clothes. There were all sorts of baseball gimcracks in the background—dummies in baseball uniforms ranging back to the nineties and so forth. This stuff set off the commercial just right and it went like clockwork. The clothes looked fine, the models terrific, and Mary never did a better job. I could see dames from coast to coast, buying sweaters and skirts with the House of Karess label.

With the commercial finished, we dissolved to Camera Four on the second floor in front of the big photographs of the Presidents I mentioned before. Grover Cleveland was front and center.

Bunny went into the question. It was a five-parter. He read Part One—and there was silence. Camera Four moved in on Mai-Mai's face. It was a complete blank. Five—six—seven seconds went by. Still silence. On television this seems like an hour. To me it seemed like a month. Bunny asked the question again. Still no reaction. Then he stammered, "Do you know the answer?" The poor kid shook her head, and started to bawl. This threw Bunny. He couldn't think of what to do next. We had been so sure she was going to breeze along that Bunny was stunned.

Another long, awkward pause. It was terrible. Suddenly Bunny realized there was nothing else for him to do but say that he was sorry, that Mai-Mai had lost. Marty, our director in New York, was on the ball. He jumped in and took the picture away from Cooperstown. I stopped looking. I wasn't interested any more. Why bother? They had some other

contestant in the wings in New York. But what mattered was that our Running Plot for Mai-Mai was out the window—in its very first week.

What I was seeing now was the expression on the face of Merton Karamaz and Myron Essenger. They'd be reaching for the telephone. I decided to be absent without leave—and at once. If the Partners got hold of me, it would ruin *my* Running Plot for the next few days.

I hurried downstairs, said good-by to the Potters. Then I went to the basement to the baseball library where we had fixed up dressing rooms. Mary was taking her pancake make-up off.

"Let's scram, honey," I said, "and fast."

"What happened?" she asked.

"What didn't?" I said. "The kid lost, and my life isn't worth a nickel. I've got to make myself scarce."

We beat it upstairs and pushed our way out the door and through the mob to my car. I helped Mary in and got behind the wheel. I skidded around the corner and tore off toward the Kozy Korner Motel.

Nobody could reach us there. Nobody but my secretary even knew where we were.

We grabbed a fast meal and a couple of drinks at a road-house joint. Then back to our motel with a bottle of Scotch, a bucket of ice, and my memories of the recently departed Mai-Mai. I was just starting to unlap. It took a lot of time and a lot of liquor.

In fact, I got kind of clobbered. I was plenty worried about what the Partners would do. And I had good reason to be.

As for Mary, she was a doll. She knew how I felt.

And so this night she let the door between Ten and Twelve remain unbolted.

## *nineteen*

Mary came out of the john in her room, crossed over into mine and said, "How do I look?" It was 7 A.M. and I had one helluva hangover.

"That's not much of a question for someone about to go fly fishing. But since you asked, I'll tell you. If any trout has the stupidity to resist you, I'd say it isn't worth the effort to cast for it. In other words, yummy."

She pirouetted before me. She had faded denim britches on and the hip boots I had loaned her pulled up over them. She wore a faded blue chambray shirt open at the throat. And on her head was an o.d.-colored affair with floppy brim, also a loan from yours truly, a couple of bright streamer flies stuck in it and the fishing license I had purchased pinned on it at a jaunty angle.

As lovely as Mary Cranston looked in the fineries of the House of Karess, she looked about twice as good in the things she now wore, despite their origin, size, and previous condition of servitude.

"We're off," I said. "I've got the rods in the car and the

lunch and a shaker of martinis on dry ice and a book of my best flies, all carefully tied by my own lily-white hands."

We climbed into our rented chariot and took the road map out of the glove compartment.

"I've got the route marked in crayon. It's about fifty miles from here to the Raratuck River which I hear tell is the best fishing stream within five hundred miles."

"Let's go. I'll follow the map. You pay attention to the road," said Mary.

I leaned over and nuzzled her cheek.

"That's the last time I take my eyes off the highway."

She kissed me on the cheek. "And I won't leave the map. Promise."

We drove slowly for about forty minutes, taking in the greenery flanking the ribbon of concrete that was Route 187 until we came to a side road, blacktopped and showing good promise of getting away from things.

It did. In about a mile or two, it began winding and showing signs of disrepair. Soon we were on the banks of the Raratuck. I found a place to park and crawled into my waders. These were armpit in length, unlike Mary's hip boots.

I put the felt-soled sneakers on over their plastic feet and laced them up tightly.

"Funny soles," said Mary, "like felt."

"They are," I said. "It's a lot less slippery than rubber. Which reminds me. Take it easy when you're walking in the stream. The rocks are especially slippery at this time of year. Algae and stuff."

"Oh, well, if I get wet, I get wet," she said.

"Yeah, but the drier you keep, the more fun fishing. The water must be pretty cold."

I took the two aluminum tubes out of the car and unscrewed the tops. Out came a fly rod from each.

"Look, young lady," I said. "I have ten fly rods but only two are worth a hoot. One of them is going to be yours today. Try to take good care of it."

"Yessir," she said.

I made one of the two slim pieces of bamboo that was to be Mary's rod and attached the reel to the reel-seat, ran the line through guides, and then reached into my canvas bag for a leader.

"I'm giving you a two-x leader, which may be a little heavy, but you'll be better off if you get a fish on."

"I've only used a fly rod a couple of times. My father was worse than you. He wouldn't let me touch his."

"What did you fish with?"

"I had my own spinning rod. So did Mom."

"Well, spinning is for meat fishermen and tourists. With me, you fly fish, honey. Or nothing."

"What an arbitrary louse you are. Even worse in the country than in the city," she said.

"Consistent is the word," I said. "You get one kiss—" which I gave her—"then I show you how to tie on a fly. Then I give you six flies which you put in the band of that hat of mine you're wearing. Then you're on your own."

"You mean we won't even be fishing near each other?"

"Sure," I laughed, "but not close enough so you can put that hook in my face. I'll check you out—then move downstream about twenty-five yards."

"Okay. But show me first."

"All right. Now watch. I'll tie on a fly." I selected a large yellow and red Mickey Finn. This is a deer-hair fly, easy to fish, and about as good a choice for the early part of the season as any I know.

"You put the leader through the eye, twist eight or nine times like so, and slip the end through here and pull."

"Let me try it," she said.

I undid the fly and gave it to her with the end of the leader.

"Right. About two more winds. Good," I said. "Now through. And pull tight. You're a genius."

"It's easy," said my lovely companion.

"It's supposed to be," I said. "So silly girls can learn in one try."

"Nuts to you," she said.

"Likewise, I'm sure," I said. My hangover was going. Fishing always did that for me. "Wait till I rig up and we'll head for the stream."

I helped her get the rhythm of casting and showed her how to strip the fly in. Then I went upstream a ways and worked on a riffle myself.

Shortly she let out a yell. She had hooked a trout. But by the time I got there to net him, he was off the hook and away.

We fished about an hour and each of us caught two trout. They only averaged about nine inches, but they were nice and dark in color and looked like natives.

Then we climbed out of the cold water and I split the four fish and built a fire. We ate them right off the backbone, salting them and dipping them in melted butter as we ate. We had a thermos of coffee, a piece of sharp store cheddar apiece, and a swig of what was left in the martini shaker. It was far better than anything Guillaume ever dreamed up.

Then we got back into the stream for an hour or so and without any further luck. Thence back to Kozy Korner. It was one fine time.

Friday we drove around the countryside.

Saturday we flew back to the city.

Thus ended as great a four days as I've ever spent. Maybe as great as I'll ever spend. Who knows? I guess Mary felt the



same. Nevertheless, as our plane got nearer and nearer to New York, she got moodier and moodier.

Maybe she figured New York stood for Reality and Cooperstown was Fantasyland. As the plane's motors droned on and on winging us toward the big town, I guess they were telling her, "This is it, sister. This is it."

## *twenty*

Most times when success arrives, you can relax a bit. You've got it made. They give you testimonial dinners. And cigars. And point you out to their kids. Not so with "Put 'N Take." The opposite was true.

No sooner did we hit the jackpot than the whole world ganged up on us. For example, the other network. We didn't expect them to take the thing lying down. I knew their sponsors would get on the phone and raise hell and demand action. How were they going to get back those audiences they lost? So the network people got their knives out.

Then there were the other packagers. And the dozens of talent shops. They came in swinging from the floor. Why? Because what had been a success wasn't their success so they looked stupid. They tried to fix that by cutting us down to size again.

And we had the trade press to help. After the buildup for the first few weeks with nice pieces, they changed their tune. They started looking for the boo-boos and they gave them front-page treatment. Nobody likes a bigshot for too

long. So it isn't good journalism to keep playing it his way. Add them to the group that was in there cutting away at us.

As for the other ad agencies, they hated our guts. They were constantly on the look-out for some cuties. And why not? Our success made them look lousy, too.

In other words, with a real hot one going for us, like the "Put 'N Take" quiz, I suddenly didn't have any friends—only enemies—and I never knew who next would have the red-hot poker out for me. Or what direction it was coming from.

I guess it came first from the MBC network. Maybe because they didn't get the show to shift over. And the guy who was wielding it was none other than Lansing Thompson, vice president in charge of programs. A pretty fancy wielder!

"I thought you might be able to spare an hour up here in our audition room," Thompson was saying to me on the phone.

"Well, I'm kind of jammed," I said. "What's up?"

"Thought you might like to see some of our new program plans. Especially some of our quiz formats," he said.

The tone of voice he was using prompted me to say yes, I'd go.

"I'll be up this afternoon. When?"

"I can get the screening room at three. See you there then. Eleventh floor. You know."

"Yeah, I know. So you've got these kinescoped already?" I said.

"Oh yes. They're finished products. All the bugs out. Ready to go on the air."

I knew I'd better see what these pilot films were. Not that I could do anything about them. But if Merton or Myron got the poop ahead of me from someone else—maybe from one of the bright boys at their other agency—I would be

considered less suitable as a Knight of the Trapezoid Table.

I got to the screening room on time. It was a smooth paneled place with antiseptic-looking furniture. In the center of one wall glared the eye of the set. Lansing and I went through the amenities and then he picked up a phone.

"Okay, roll it," he said. The first show appeared on the tube.

"It Pays To Be Smart," said the announcer over a series of large books, maybe encyclopedias, zooming at me. Soon we were into the game and guess what? We met humble people who looked very smart indeed. People in all walks of life who were "educated" in the most erudite ways and in the most off-beat fields. And guess what? They won gobs of money. And they were invited back week after week. To increase their winnings.

"A very unusual show," I said to Lansing when the half hour had run out. "Novel idea. Wonder where it came from?"

He played it very straight.

"It is good, isn't it?" he said. "Should have great appeal."

"Yes," I said. "I feel you're on the right track."

"But wait till you see the other," said Lansing without batting an eyelash.

"I'm all ears and eyes," I said. "Like Pathé News."

Epic Number Two was phoned for and shortly unfolded on the TV set.

This was an even better carbon of "Put 'N Take." Everything that could be begged, borrowed, or stolen and still kept pretty well clear of infringement was there. No use my going into the similarities. Believe me, MBC was lavish with them. The show was called "Two-Four-Six-Eight" which had something to do with the structure of the prize money.

"Isn't this one exciting?" said Lansing.

"Quite," I said. "Messieurs Karamaz and Essenger may find it almost as exciting as their own television venture."

Similar, too. Enough so to call a hundred or so of their lawyers. But, hell, you've got a stableful of lawyers yourself, and it's a good way to make 'em earn their big retainers. Keep 'em busy, I always say."

"I agree with you, Rog," said Lansing sweetly. "What's a lawyer for if he's not suing or defending."

"Of course," I said. "Of course, when the firm of Kaufmann and O'Connor, which represents Karess, puts together one of its juicy complaints about these shows, it may deter sponsors from buying them. And you certainly wouldn't want to sustain two programs. Even for art's sake. Would you, Lansing?"

"You're absolutely right, Rog," said my friend. "We couldn't afford to sustain either of these shows. Too expensive an operation. So what do you think?"

"I can't imagine," I said. "You tell me."

"We've got our sponsors all signed up. And we've indemnified them ourselves. One hundred per cent. That's how confident we are these shows are in the clear. All original creations."

"I admire your foresight," I said. "And courage."

"Now let me tell you two other things. Then we have to get out of here. There's another screening scheduled."

"You're doing a land-office business."

He smiled sweetly.

"Number One—that first show you saw—'It Pays To Be Smart,' will be sponsored by Affinity Fashions."

"How nice," I thought. They were Karess's biggest competitors in the sportswear and casual stuff area.

"And second, here are the time slots—the 'Smart' show goes into Wednesday night at eight-thirty P.M. And 'Two-Four-Six-Eight' goes into nine-thirty P.M. on Wednesday, too," he emphasized.

He didn't have to. I got it.

It was the slickest inside play since the Trojan Horse. I had to hand it to him. Anything to clobber us. What they had done was paraphrase our show. Not just once. But twice. And then they'd taken these two carbon copies and bracketed our show with them. On the same night we were on, they'd be there, too—one a half hour ahead of us, the other just after we went off the air. If that didn't take the edge off "Put 'N Take," an atom bomb wouldn't. And that's just what Lansing Thompson had in mind. He'd surfeit the public with quizzes, with kindly old slobs showing great bundles of wisdom, winning great bundles of loot, and dissipate our audience. Maybe he'd hire the Chinese Army and give away concubines.

"Well, thanks for everything," I said. "I'll be heading for the House of Karess."

"I was sure you would be," said Lansing. "I'm sorry, Rog. But I had no other way to turn."

"I guess not," I said. "Well, we'll see." And I left him and his Danish modern furniture.

"You mean to stand there and tell me you're letting them steal our show?" screamed Merton Karamaz.

"And what's worse, you're letting them put *two* of them on the same night we're on?" shrieked Myron Essenger.

I nodded my head. "I can't stop them."

"We'll sue," they both shouted in chorus. "For millions!"

Messrs. Kaufmann, Senior, Kaufmann, Junior, and O'Connor talked up a storm.

"I don't think you have a prayer," I said. "They have cleverly masked or altered every little thing that they duplicated," I said. "Of course, you can still try."

"You're damn right we will," said Merton Karamaz.

"I say we've got a good case," said Myron Essenger, look-

ing at his covey of legal backstops. "Haven't we?" he asked. They all nodded.

"We'll scare the hell out of them," said Mr. O'Connor.

"They don't scare," I said. "They have lawyers, too, you know."

"Start suing at once," barked Merton.

"They haven't done anything to you yet," I said.

"So what!" said Merton Karamaz grabbing me by the lapels. "Not a day goes by when *we're* not sued. We sue back. We never wait. We sue first. If we don't win, we keep them off balance and there's always the chance you may win. I hate people who are too scared to get into lawsuits. We thrive on them."

"Nothing sued, nothing gained," said Myron Essenger, philosopher.

"What an interesting credo," I said.

"How can we get a copy of these shows?" asked Kaufmann, Jr.

All eyes turned to me.

"I know damn well I can't get one," I said.

"You're not being very helpful," said Merton Karamaz.

"That's because I'm helpless," I said.

"Well, how do you suggest *we* get them?" asked Myron. "That's what you're paid for. To help us."

"The only thing I can think of is to have your other agency ask the network for the shows. I doubt if this will work, but let them try."

"We're having to rely on the other agency more and more these days," said Merton pointedly.

"A very clever group of men," said Myron.

"They were told to strengthen their Television Department, and they did," said Merton.

"They hired some very capable people," said Myron. "And their account men are great."

"Can we talk about something else?" I asked.

"We'd like to," said Merton Karamaz. "Especially with our lawyers here. Our other agency reports that Bunny Lewis has spent the past four weeks making film somewhere out in Long Island for UBC."

Mr. O'Connor got into the dialogue. "I have a trade article here," he said, "that states Mr. Lewis is doing something, but it didn't say what and for whom." He handed it to me.

"But we have other sources," said Merton.

I hadn't seen the piece. In fact, I wasn't aware of anything.

"The network which has our show," said Myron Essenger, "has been filming our MC, Mr. Bunny Lewis, for master of ceremonies in an interesting *new* program."

"It can't be for a quiz," I said. "His contract prohibits it."

"It can't be," said Merton. "So it's for something else."

"What else?" I asked.

"You remember that series of half-hour melodramas we once had?"

"The ones you suggested the network put into syndication?" said Myron.

I nodded. I was kind of groggy.

"It is going to be retitled, 'The Bunny Lewis Anthology,' and our MC will appear as host in every one of them."

"No, it's not a quiz," said Merton.

"Furthermore," said Myron, "they expect to sell this series in over sixty markets just on the strength of Bunny Lewis being in it. That's what we hear."

"Yes, we hear that and we'd like your opinion," said Myron, "of what this does to us?"

I thought fast. "Well," I said, "I'm not sure it will hurt us."

"You aren't?" said Merton. "Well, we are."

"Of course," I continued, "you won't have him all to yourself any longer. It may weaken his identification with you—spread him thin."



"Precisely," said Myron. "That's why he should have been signed exclusively with us. You prepared the contract."

"Who knew at the time," I said, "that that broken-down bum would be in demand at all. Anyway, you can't lock a man up completely. Slavery is illegal. You got all the protection I thought was necessary. At the time."

"Unfortunately, it wasn't enough," said Merton. "At this time!"

"Consequently," said Myron, "we intend to sue the network as well as Mr. Lewis."

"What for?" I said.

"For breach of contract," said Myron.

"But you know Bunny didn't breach his contract. You just admitted it."

"His attitude is all wrong," said Merton Karamaz. "It shows no gratitude."

"We made him great," said Myron. "With our money. He's now wasting our money."

"Isn't that so?" Merton Karamaz asked the legal eagles. They nodded their heads. "So you see, Mr. Norden, we keep a number of lawsuits going at all times."

"It doesn't pay to sue your own client," I said. "They can get even with you too easily."

"Let them try," said Merton Karamaz.

"Yeah, let them," said Myron Essenger.

Despite the threat of a lawsuit with MBC, the two shows moved into Wednesday night. One a half-hour in front of us. The other directly following. And the network took big space in all the newspapers attesting to the novelty and excitement of their two new shows. Also they did an all-out promotion job.

Bud Swanson and Bert Vernon were selected to MC the properties—both of them well-established men in the field.

The network did this, not because it wouldn't have been sounder in the long run to go out and develop an MC as we did, but because they wanted to start fast. They weren't playing for the long haul. They were using a short knife, the kind that goes into the ribs fast but does just as good a job.

Roux & Day ordered telegraphic Trendexes to see what effect this counterprograming would have. Not that we didn't know. But we couldn't afford to sit around a whole month until Nielsen came out with the results. And this time the agency paid the bill. It was pretty unpleasant—to pay out our own money for bad news. And bad news it was.

From the very first night we started to feel the effects of the competition. We were whittled down five points on the first Trendex, which we knew would translate to an eight-to-twelve-point drop on Nielsen—plenty to knock us out of the top ten. Since the first night was heavily promoted, it made a bigger slice than the next few. But on Weeks Five, Six, and Seven, competition started the old climb again. And we were on the toboggan. Then the crusher hit us.

We'd had a real patsy directly opposite our half-hour—a show called "A Day with Mame." This little clambake was supposedly a situation comedy. Over the months it turned out to be lacking in comedy as well as situation. Suddenly "A Day with Mame" was killed. In place of it the network came up with what turned out to be the first of a whole new trend of shows known as—the Adult Western. It was "adult" in contrast to the Hopalongs and Lone Rangers and other oat-burners of the early days of TV. This meant it had more characterization and subtler plotting—relying less on chase and gunplay. The good guys weren't all so goddam good that they were unbelievable and the bad guys didn't wear masks and black gloves and hate their mothers. The show caught on.

You may recall it was titled "The Lonely Star," and it had

a continuing character played by a real fine actor, Dell Royce. Royce had won an Academy Award five years before and he knew how to underplay everything so it wasn't corny—even shooting up a dozen Mexican *hombres* with his right arm in a sling.

"The Lonely Star" had been developed by a couple of friends of mine who worked for Continental Artists, the Number Two talent agency in the business. They had let me see a script, and I guess I was the first guy to see the pilot film after it came out of the lab.

I could tell right off they had something. And that we had trouble. I couldn't have predicted, of course, the big trend to the Adult Westerns so I didn't know how much trouble. What happened is now TV history.

As if that wasn't enough, one of the big business weeklies put Karess's big competitor—Sam Gasner—who sponsored the "It Pays To Be Smart" quiz on MBC, on their cover. In four colors. Inside they did a few hundred icky words about what a shrewd merchant the man was and how clever he was to be able to pick out this new hot-shot television program. This, of course, burned Merton and Myron to a delicate crisp. Maybe even more than the ratings drop of their own show. As a result, Merton yanked a twelve-page ad campaign on the financial status of Karess.

With the foregoing as background material, you can see why I looked forward to the summons issued by Merton's secretary one fine Tuesday morning to get over there pronto. We did.

"I suppose you are wondering why I invited you, gentlemen." Merton Karamaz was doing the talking.

The gentlemen he referred to were Harold Day, Kevin Antrim, and yours truly.

To say we were wondering was part understatement. Part

overstatement. We knew it had something to do with the show.

The latest Trendex was off eighteen points from our peak. We'd be lucky if we'd be in the top thirty shows on Nielsen.

What specifically the man had in mind, we didn't have any idea. We couldn't have. We never could have guessed the charm of the plot hatched by those ever-loving Partners.

"My partner has been preparing for this meeting and will take over," said Merton. He buzzed the onyx buzzer on his desk.

So Myron was going to play the heavy. And with rehearsal. A nice switch! Kevin looked at me. I looked at Harold.

The door to Merton's office opened and an office boy came in. He was bearing a big black turnover, same size as the one I had used on them. The boy set it up on the trapezoid table and left.

With splendid timing, Myron Essenger marched in just as the boy had finished snapping the buttons on the back.

He nodded to each of us but did not speak until he got to the first page. It was blank. He flipped it dramatically baring page two on which in large red letters was:

#### RATING DECLINE OF "PUT 'N TAKE"

"We have here a rating study of what's been happening to our program in the last few months. I think you will find it interesting," he said.

"And revealing," said Merton Karamaz.

Nobody else said a word.

"Note here the blue bars. They are our Trendex ratings. Trendex," he directed at me, "demonstrates what is happening in the competitive markets. It is a reflection of program strength."

"*Touché*," I said to myself.

"Or lack of it," said Merton.

"Or lack of it," repeated Myron. "In this case, you will note that ever since the MBC program structure changed, we began our slide."

He flipped another page. "Here we have another interesting chart." He was still looking at me. I returned the glance without a waver.

"Sets-in-use," I said.

"Yes. They paint a very clear picture," said Myron Essenger.

"What you see here," he said, now directing his glance toward Kevin and then Hal Day, "is how our program once increased sets-in-use far beyond anything that had ever been done in this time spot. To the left are the bars showing what percentage was tuned to the spot *before* our program, next is shown during our rise, and the dip here is what's been happening lately.

"I asked the agency to put this chart in for you, Mr. Norden, since you are a student of sets-in-use," he said.

I thanked him. He was sure giving it to me good. All my own material. So he had gotten his data from the other agency. It figured. It was nice to know they were being so cooperative.

"Now, let's look at what's happened to the numbers of homes we are now reaching," continued Myron. "This in direct contrast to the number which received our little sales messages only a few months ago." He then went to the next page. It, too, was pretty sad.

"Finally," Myron said, "our efficiency—I believe that's the word you use, Mr. Norden—"

"Yes, I do," I said.

"—our efficiency, that is, our cost per thousand homes reached per commercial minute," said Myron Essenger, "has turned into *inefficiency*."

I had to jump in here. "I can't agree with you," I said.

"The show is only inefficient in contrast to what it was. During the months it *built* sets-in-use to a new high, your cost per thousand was the lowest ever achieved. Now you set that up as the norm. I don't think that's fair."

"Who wants to be fair?" snapped Merton Karamaz.

"It costs too much to be fair," said Myron Essenger. "Because to be fair, you mean we must be content with an average show—an average cost per thousand and an average size of audience. The average has never appealed to us and never will."

"Any show that's had a meteoric rise like this one," I said, "must have a drop. Nobody could maintain the pace this program set. To achieve it at all was a miracle."

"To keep it going is the job of the agency," said Merton Karamaz.

"We expect a miracle," said Myron Essenger.

"In other words," I said, "whether it's impossible or not?"

"Correct," said Merton.

"One hundred per cent," said Myron.

Myron went back to the turnover. "This is the final page. An analysis of all the time spots available on UBC. It brings us to the purpose of the meeting."

Oh-oh, I thought.

"These are the time spots on the network that are better than ours," he said. "They are all on UBC because we are obligated to continue there, thanks to a contract negotiated by Mr. Norden."

A nice dig. The only way we had gotten the free daytime was by firming up the show on UBC. He knew that. Also there was no thought of moving then.

"Therefore, it is our suggestion," Myron Essenger said, "or rather we insist that our agency, Mr. Day and Mr. Norden, begin negotiations at once with the principals at UBC. We want one of these other time spots."

He pointed to the checkerboard of the entire week on the page. All the half-hour evening segments were depicted and four of them were outlined in red. Every one of them had two alternate week advertisers firmly entrenched in it. Every one of them was prime time, to be sure; but it took colossal gall to think the network would bounce current advertisers and turn one of these spots over to Karess.

"Did it ever occur to you that our relationship with the network isn't very good?" I asked when I finally came up for air.

"We seldom have good relationships with anyone," said Merton Karamaz.

"It's the job of the agency to smooth these details over," said Myron Essenger.

"They're not details," I said. "For example, you're now in the process of suing the network. This can hardly be considered a display of affection. Suing them for using Bunny Lewis on a series of films they relieved you of, thus taking a bath for over two hundred thousand dollars."

"A lawsuit implies no ill will," said Merton Karamaz. "It is a business transaction."

"To you maybe," I said, "but not to UBC. Furthermore, and I hate to say this, our present show isn't doing well enough now for them to push other people around to accommodate it."

"That is the problem," said Myron Essenger.

"That is *your* problem," said Merton Karamaz.

"Why," I said "should the network knuckle under for 'Put 'N Take' now?"

"That is a question for you to answer," said Merton Karamaz.

"There is no answer," I said.

"There has to be," said Myron Essenger.

"And now one more point," said Merton Karamaz.

I couldn't believe there was anything else left to say. But there was.

"I have here," he said reaching for a piece of paper on his desk, "a bill for five thousand five hundred and thirty-four dollars and twenty-seven cents. This purports to be the cost of a remote telecast done at Cooperstown, New York. You recall the event?" he asked.

"Vividly," I said. Kevin and Harold nodded.

"We agreed to pay the difference between the regular cost of televising and whatever was necessary to go to Cooperstown with one of our contestants?"

I nodded.

"The purpose of this broadcast," he said, "was not merely to add scope and interest to the program. I believe I'm quoting you correctly, Mr. Norden?"

"You are," I said.

"The purpose was also to start a superior contestant on a long chain of weekly broadcasts. This was supposed to build our ratings week after week and help us hit a new high. Wasn't that the way it was expressed?"

I nodded again.

"You may also recall what happened at Cooperstown."

I recalled a lot about Cooperstown. I didn't mention any of it.

Merton continued. "Instead of the young girl continuing week after week on the subject of our national pastime, she missed the first night. Correct?"

Kevin spoke for the first time. "Well, for Christ's sake, you can't blame us for that. We thought we had everything set. The kid goofed. That's all. She goofed. She knew her stuff, but she drew an effing blank."

"Nevertheless, the young lady missed. Consequently," said Merton Karamaz holding his hand out to me with the letter in it, "I am returning your bill."



This was a nice spot to be in.

"The situation was misrepresented to us. So the added cost became the problem of the agency and the packager."

Harold Day took the bill. I didn't know what he was going to say. I didn't know what Kevin would say. Kevin didn't have a chance because Harold spoke first.

"While I don't sympathize with your point of view, Mr. Karamaz, because we had no control over what happened, we will consider your request. I'll discuss the matter with Mr. Antrim and we'll get back to you."

"Please do. We dislike having bills hanging over our heads."

The meeting was at an end.

The bill, by the way, was never presented to the House of Karess again. Harold Day and Kevin Antrim decided to split it. I guess we had no other alternative. But it made me sick anyway.

Four other things should be reported here. First: I did my best to get UBC to move us to a new time spot. I wheedled. I threatened. I was sweet. I talked to every one there—first Baumgarten, then Guyon, then Thau, then Timmons. The most pleasant was bad language (Mr. Timmons). In other words, the answer was No with a big fat Capital Letter.

Second: I delivered unto the Partners another account man. Brought him over myself. By popular request. That is, they requested that we remove our St. Louis importee promptly. Meaning now! All I'll say about the new man we selected was that he came under the category of Cretin. That's why we picked him. Along with this quality we hoped he'd bring a certain resilience to the job, an ability to roll with the punches. Such insensitivity we felt might stand him in good stead. It didn't. For the record, his name was Irving W. Small. I did not envy Irving. But what the hell, I didn't envy myself either.

Third: The Partners showed up at the program that week with a man I didn't know. They were very chummy. And very charming. And they didn't introduce me. By the look of this chap's clothes and his vest with the lapels, I figured him for an agency man. The twelve-cylinder account-executive type!

Fourth: With regard to Mary. That same night up at the show, I asked her about the following Saturday. I suggested that we drive up into Connecticut somewhere. Maybe Cobb's Hill or Stonehenge and have a good meal and then amble back to town.

She said, "I'm sorry, Rog, I'm busy."

Just like that. She was sorry. She was busy. Period.

I guess I stared. I didn't expect this—much less the kind of no I got.

She added "I've got a date."

I still didn't say anything. I couldn't, in fact. I couldn't think of anything to say. I guess I was still staring. So she spoke again.

"I'm going away for the week end," she said. "I'm visiting the family of a boy who works on my daytime show."

That was the first time she had refused a date with me. going away for the week end." I nodded and left.

That was all. No muss, no fuss. Just: "I'm busy. We're First time since we met. It kind of rocked me back on Mr. O'Sullivan's heels.

I got very loaded that night. I kept it up all week end, too, for that matter.

## *twenty-one*

Mary had called me and I was out. She left word she would like to see me at lunch and it was urgent.

My girl contacted me and we made it for 1 P.M. at La Boite. I told Guillaume to save a good table somewhere far away from the madding crowd.

When I arrived she was already seated. It was a table suitably gloomy and very secluded.

"Hi, honey," I said. "Sorry I'm a bit late. I hate to see a young girl, especially one as well-known as you, arrive unescorted. It's bad publicity."

She didn't reply. She knew I was ribbing her but all she said was "hello." The mission was one of real consequence. That I knew—not only from the urgency of her message but the look on her face.

"I caught your daytime show last week," I said. "I think you do fine."

"Thanks, Rog. It seems to get smoother every day. Jack says I'll soon be able to do without Teleprompter—and just use cue cards for the various parts of it. That'll make me sound more natural," he says.

"Yeah. I suppose so," I said. "By the way, tell your director to lay off those down shots he takes of you. Makes you look dumpy. Eye level or lower is right. But not down on you."

"Thanks, Rog. I'll tell Jack."

"Jack? He's your director?"

She nodded.

"I came to tell you something, Rog. In fact, it's about Jack."

We both ordered our food and gave out with a modicum of small talk. When Guillaume left the table, I said, "Okay, start talking."

"Please don't say anything funny or interrupt or say anything at all till I'm through."

"My lips are sealed," I said.

"We've been together a lot lately," she said. "And I've never felt for anyone else what I have for you."

I nodded. I was going to say "Come to the point" but I had promised not to speak.

"We both knew it had to end—that it had no future, no purpose—and now, Rog, the end is here."

I nodded. What else could I have done?

"I'm going to be married," Mary Cranston said.

I pretended she had said something like isn't it nice that the crocus are out or what do you think they are putting in the baked Alaska these days.

I nodded.

"I'm getting married in four weeks. To Jack Freisall, who directs my daytime show."

I nodded again. I had a nice flexible head motion.

"He's a wonderful guy—only a year older than I—and very talented."

I spoke for the first time. I said, "He is three ways better. Like in the laxative ads."

Her look said I shouldn't talk that way.

"I would appreciate it if I could leave here now. I don't feel like eating."

"I'm hungry enough for two," I said. I was amazed I could talk so glibly and hurt so much. But I'd be goddamned if I'd show it.

"I'm glad he's young. You should be with a young man," I said. "They're so virile. And understanding. And they don't have bellies," I said.

She ignored the comment.

"Would you mind taking me to the street. I'd like to leave," she said.

"I'd be glad to," I answered. I put my napkin on the table and followed her to the door. The doorman hailed a cab. I took her hand. It was warm and firm. I leaned forward and put my lips against the tip of her nose.

"Congratulations," I said.

"Thank you, Rog," she said, "I hope you really feel that way."

"I know it's important to you how I feel," I said without inflection.

"Please, Rog," she said. "It's hard enough."

"I don't think we could have gotten many more weeks out of this plot anyway, do you?" I said.

"Please, Rog," she said. She got into the cab. The man shut the door. I gave him a quarter. Twenty-five cents to transport my true love into the arms of her true love.

The cab pulled away from the curb, and I saw the back of her head through the rear window until another cab pulled up behind hers.

Then I went back to the restaurant and paid my check. I couldn't eat either. This hurt Guillaume's feelings, but somehow I didn't seem to care.

## *twenty-two*

I had just picked up the phone when Harold Day walked into my office. "Did you get a call from Merton Karamaz asking you to join him at lunch tomorrow at the Colonial Room in the Carver?"

I put the phone down. "Yes," I replied. "In fact I was just calling you about it."

"I wonder what's up," said Harold Day.

"I'm not sure," I said, "but whatever it is, I don't think it's good."

"Any special reason?"

"No, other than what's been happening to the show. The legal complications and all the other problems," I said. "On the other hand, there is something. For two shows in a row now, the Partners have shown up during dress rehearsal with some character I don't know. If he's not in the agency business, I can't tell an account man from a chorus boy."

"You don't know who?" asked Harold.

"Well, all we can do is face it, whatever it is," he said.

I shook my head.

"Yeah, and in the meanwhile we can lose some sleep, some fingernails, and some stomach," I said.

It felt like the reprise of an old and familiar tune—walking down the carpeted corridor to the Colonial Room of the Carver Hotel. Not that I hadn't been there since my first meeting with the Partners. But I felt there was another chapter heading to this lunch just as there had been before.

We told the same snotty Maitre d' that we'd like to be shown to the Karamaz table and he oozed along with us in tow. Neither Partner was there yet, so Harold and I sat. He nibbled at a roll. "I think I'll take a drink," I said. "In fact, I'm going to make it a double."

"You sound pessimistic," said Harold.

"I think we should be." I signaled for the waiter and gave him my order. The Partners hovered into view and approached the table. Neither was smiling. We said, "Hello," and they sat down.

"I took the liberty of ordering a drink," I said to them. Merton nodded. Myron said, "Certainly."

"And you, Mr. Day?" he asked.

Harold said, "No, thank you."

We ordered our food and the Partners went into their usual act about how to cook the hamburger and what color the spinach should be and what kind of oil was right for the salad. I took the loss-leader of the day so I wouldn't have to think about it. The conversation was kept trivial until the food arrived. I had taken one mouthful when Merton delivered the prologue.

"We asked you two gentlemen here for a very specific reason."

Here it comes, I knew. The daily special didn't taste very good.

Merton reached inside his coat pocket and took out an

envelope. He opened the envelope and unfolded a letter. The paper crinkled loudly. It was the finest vellum you could buy, and I could see that the words were done on Varitype. Real formal.

"This is addressed to you, Mr. Day, as president of your agency," said Merton and then proceeded to read it.

The letter contained such lovely thoughts as "it has been a rewarding experience working with you and Mr. Norden and your other associates." Next there was some stuff about "we hope that the friendships we have built during the past year will endure."

Then came the hooker.

"We feel that it is best for both parties concerned to terminate our relationship. There are many reasons for this, but since they are as well known to you as they are to us, enumerating them would be both painful and unnecessary. Consequently, this will serve as a formal notification severing our relationship thirty days from today. We trust that you will do everything possible to make the transition to whatever agency we appoint as smooth as possible. Very truly yours, Merton Karamaz, President, House of Karess."

I looked at Harold. His face had not changed. Not a muscle moved until he spoke.

"Well, I guess there isn't much to say," he said to the Partners.

"No, there isn't," said Merton Karamaz.

"Not a word," said Myron Essenger.

"There are a lot of things that *could* be said," I commented.

Harold Day looked at me and his eyes said, "Don't."

"I don't think we need tell you that this is a blow to us and that we regret your decision. However, if that's the way things must be, so be it."

We finished our meal in silence. When each had drained



his cup of coffee, Merton Karamaz took the letter he had read, put it back in its envelope and handed it to me.

We rose and shook hands all around. It was pretty bad melodrama. Suitable only for syndication.

"Good-by," said Harold Day.

"So long," I said.

The Partners nodded. We padded our way across the carpeted restaurant and down the corridor.

Hal and I climbed into a cab and gave the driver our office address. We sat in silence as the cab turned onto Madison Avenue and headed downtown. I had to say something.

"Here's the letter from Merton. I guess you'll want to file it. It'll be nice to show your grandchildren."

He took it and put it in his inside pocket. He still didn't say a word.

"Look, Hal," I said. "Where the hell did I go wrong?"

He smiled at me and put his hand on my arm for an instant. I think I once mentioned about his eyes—they were just about the friendliest in the whole damn world.

"Well," he said slowly, "I think we made a few mistakes."

"'We'—where do you get the 'we'? If anything went wrong, I was responsible. Don't try and spare me the facts."

"It's 'we,' Rog, remember with anything that's done by Roux & Day. If it's good, I look good. If it's the other way around, I look bad. That's my job. That's why my name is there—on the stationery and so forth."

"Okay," I said. "Let's play it like Lindberg. Where did *we* go wrong?"

"By forgetting who 'we' were and how 'we' got that way," he replied.

"And what does that mean?" I said.

"Keep on driving," Harold said to the driver. "Down Madison."

"We became all gimmick and finagle trying to handle the account for the Partners. It's wrong—and furthermore, it doesn't work."

"But they expected it. That's why they hired us. Hell, that's what they wanted out of me. Not kindly and gentle philosophies."

"That's what we thought," said Harold. He shook his head. "But we were wrong. We could lose it that way. After a time."

"You think they'd have stuck with us if we'd have acted like genial old Roux & Day, agency for Consolidated Industries for three decades?"

"Yes, Rog I do. I think that they'd have resented us first, then envied us for being this way. And then they'd have admired us. The whole advertising business—not just our agency—has been built that way. Men like William H. Johns stood for the best qualities only. They devoted their lives to making advertising respected and worthy of being called a profession. This turned out to be the right way. And the only way."

"I know—I know—for most people. But not for Merton and Myron—"

"For everybody. The very same things those first great ad men fought against are exactly the same things that tear the business down now. The sharp deal. The planted lie. The playing of one party against another. The fast talk. The loose language. I don't have to tell you—"

"No, you don't. Because I've become a past master at them. Right?"

"I'm glad you used the word 'past.' I've watched you do these things. You don't like them. I know that."

"So what? I did them."

"Yes—and they backfired. That proved it wasn't worth it. Vindicated your better judgment."

"My better judgment spoke too low and too late."

"It's never too late. You believe in this business. You know our country has a productive capacity almost beyond comprehension. You know that distribution is the big problem. So, if we're to move ahead and keep moving ahead, you know that's where *we* come in. Distribution is our task in the scheme of things."

"That's for sure," I said. Dr. Harold Day, M.D., had just slipped me a Happy Pill, double strength. It was taking effect.

"Where to now, buddy?" said our cab driver. We looked out and saw we were at Madison Square with its green plots of grass and its benches.

"Turn around and go back up Madison. To the fifties," said Harold. The cab driver shook his head and turned.

"This thing I work in—TV—is really an opportunity," I heard myself saying to Harold, "to do something worthwhile."

"You know it and also you know how to do it," said Harold. "Every time you put someone on camera, he talks to more people than anyone ever talked to before in the history of the world. And people are listening more intently. But they're searching too. They're not satisfied with what they see and hear. They want new things. They want to learn. You can't deny them this."

We talked this way right into the fifties. When the cab stopped, Harold got out.

"I've still got things to think about," I said. "I won't be back today."

Harold shook my hand and left.

"Keep going," I said to the cab driver. "Right up Madison until you come to the end."

"Okay, buddy," he said. "If you say so."

I thought about Mary and the stupid way I treated her.

Never facing the fact that I was in love with her. Never willing to give. Only to take.

I finally paid the driver off at Harlem and 138th Street. I gave him a dollar tip. At my feet the dirty swirling waters of the Harlem River spelled the end of Madison Avenue. I turned my back to the river and looked downtown. In the distance you could see some of the real tall buildings though they were too far away to recognize. A purplish haze covered their lower stories which made the buildings seem to grow out of it.

One hundred and fifteen blocks of Madison Avenue lay in front of me. Tomorrow morning I'd go to work on one of them again, and the first thing I'd do would be to get together with Harold Day and George Roux and we'd start working on a plan on how to get another account in the fashion field. Where our experience could be applied. Only most of it wouldn't apply. I'd handle things differently this time. The new folks wouldn't know it, of course, but I would. And Harold would. And George Roux would. So would people like Grant Baumgarten and Kevin Antrim and dozens of others. And maybe I'd run into a girl—who knows?

The rosy glow was stealing higher and higher up the buildings. I started walking. I didn't expect to get very far before I'd hail a cab. I wanted to save myself for tomorrow.

For some reason, I thought of the first lines in that "On the Street Where You Live" number from *My Fair Lady*—

I have often walked down this street before,  
But the pavement always stayed beneath my feet before.  
All at once am I sev'ral stories high.

It was work trying to be that big on this street where I live. I'd start tomorrow.















